

Copyright
by
Anissa Jean Rodriguez
2007

**The Dissertation Committee for Anissa Jean Rodriguez Certifies that this is the
approved version of the following dissertation:**

**SOCIAL PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICIES IN TEXAS
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

Committee:

Pedro Reyes, Supervisor

Norma Cantu

Michelle Young

Angela Valenzuela

Cynthia Salinas

Dawnovise Fowler

**SOCIAL PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICIES IN TEXAS
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

by

Anissa Jean Rodriguez, B.S.; M.Ed.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2007

Dedication

To all those who go above and beyond what is expected to educate children.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been a work in progress for some time now. I have been thinking of this research ever since my work in the public schools began in 2001. My teaching, administration, and other experiences in public education have taught me invaluable lessons about students and how to lead with their best interests at the forefront of all decisions. I began the Ph.D. program in Educational Policy and Planning in 2003 and this dissertation work in particular began in 2005. My experiences as a school administrator caused me to narrow in on the topic of student retention and promotion as required by the Student Success Initiative. The opportunity to participate in the grade placement committee meetings gave me an inside perspective as to how the mismatch between educational policy at the state level did not match the implementation and use at the local level primarily due to various stakeholder perceptions and interpretations about the policy. There are many important people whom I wish to thank and recognize for supporting me through this endeavor.

I want to thank Dr. Pedro Reyes for his guidance and mentorship. When I was working for the Texas A&M University System Partnership for Texas Public Schools I began asking him for advice while navigating the coursework in the EPP program at UT. Dr. Reyes has been an integral guide in this research ever since our first meeting when our mutual enthusiasm for this dissertation topic caused us to hope that it might even possibly have policy implications. Although Dr. Reyes is extremely busy he graciously agreed to be my dissertation committee chair.

I want to thank all of my prestigious dissertation committee members for their patience, guidance, and suggestions. I can honestly say that when I was a graduate student at Texas A&M University many of the readings that we reflected upon were written by most of my committee. I can remember thinking that the contributions to educational research of Dr. Pedro Reyes, Dr. Angela Valenzuela, Dr. Norma Cantu, Dr. Cynthia Salinas, and Dr. Michelle Young were brilliant and that I would most likely never have the opportunity to meet these great educational policy pioneers. Not only was I able to meet these contributors to the fields of educational policy, bilingual education and curriculum and instruction issues in education but I was honored enough to have them as members of my committee. Dr. Dawnovise Fowler has also been an integral committee member. When I took her course on Social Justice in the College of Social Work and witnessed her passion and dedication to this area of research I knew she would make a wonderful contribution to the dissertation committee and she has.

Special thanks are necessary to my research participants. The candid and lengthy interviews that they participated in contributed largely to the richness of this research. I found their views and perceptions to be most valuable in this study. I greatly appreciate the teachers, the parents and the administrators who agreed to assist me in this research.

Very special thanks are necessary for several of my graduate school friends. Three of my classmates deserve an extra special thanks. Dr. Michelle Arnold has been my constant confidante, friend, cheerleader, advisor, mentor, hero, shoulder to cry on, my comfort, my encouragement, my grace. Michelle, I don't know what I would do without your friendship. I am blessed to know you and John and to have you as such an important part of my life. I cannot thank you enough for your encouragement and

support. I am so proud of you Michelle. I admire the life that you live. I cannot wait until we take a well-deserved group vacation very, very soon! Special thanks also go to Dr. Alejandra Rincon. Alejandra, you were such an important part of my graduate school experience at UT. You also kept me in line and served as a mentor in that you were farther along in the program than I was and could guide me. I thank you so much for your support and encouragement and I am so proud of everything that you have done in your education and career. Ms. Shannon Stackhouse also deserves very special thanks. I thank you for being such a good friend and for giving me well-timed and well-deserved breaks to go “dahn-cing.” Remember the time we went ice-skating at Whole Foods? I have fun memories of our time in the EPP program together especially going to conferences and sharing our views about social justice and other educational issues. You have been a great encouragement and supporter to me. Thank you for being a good friend. I want to give special thanks to my dissertation editor Christa Arnold for her wonderful help at the last minute. Thank you so much.

Very special thanks are in order to my best friends who have been so patient and loving with me during this stressful time of completing the dissertation. Alyssa Lopez and the newly married Lorraine Page, you are my sisters from another mother. I love you both so much. You girls think that I can do anything and you always have faith in me even when I don’t have faith in myself. What can I say? I would never have been able to do this without you girls. Your offers of coffee breaks, loving calls and text messages mean so much to me. Thank you.

Mike, now it’s your turn. I want to thank you for supporting me and encouraging me throughout this entire year that I have been working hard on this endeavor. You were

content just to be around me, take care of me, pop in movies to watch while we worked, so many times you kept me company while I wrote. I love you. You have been such an important part of my life. You came just at the right time. Your presence gives me peace and comfort. Your love has given me courage and hope. You have shown me what it is to love someone unconditionally and to make sacrifices. You have seen first hand what it has taken to overcome this hurdle. I am fortunate that you took this journey with me and we will forever have this time in our lives to look back upon and laugh like you always say. You will never know how much I appreciate everything that you have done for me.

Thank you to Jesse, a.k.a. Sesse, my baby brother and the best roommate ever! I could not have done this without you either. You are always willing to help me in any way possible. Remember the time my computer crashed and we were desperately trying to recover my information from the hard drive. I know you felt my pain and had empathy for me. Your light-hearted comments and encouragement and unfailing assumption that I would be able to finish this monstrous dissertation have helped me more than you will ever know. I am very proud of the person that you have become.

I am blessed by my amazing parents, Belinda and Jesse Rodriguez. You have both been my biggest supporters and cheerleaders. Somehow you both have the same notion as Jesse, that I can do anything and that I would be able to finish this life's work even when I doubted that I could balance this work and my job and the regular stress of life. Thank you for praying for me and encouraging me and loving me. I thank Diosito most importantly for giving me faith and I thank Him for you both. I would never have been able to do this without the love and faith that you both give me.

SOCIAL PROMOTION AND RETENTION POLICIES IN TEXAS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Publication No. _____

Anissa Jean Rodriguez, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2007

Supervisor: Pedro Reyes

The Student Success Initiative (SSI) established, in 1999, various promotional gates for students to pass the state-mandated high-stakes assessment test known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge & Skills (TAKS), administered in the areas of reading for third graders and of reading and math for fifth graders. Largely perceived as anti-social promotion legislation, outcomes of the SSI implementation did not seem to coincide with their original intentions. To ascertain the veracity of this claim, interviews were scheduled with a variety of local level stakeholders serving as decision-making participants in a structure known as the grade placement committee. Grade placement committee members address student promotion and retention decisions when students do not meet the passing standards for the TAKS tests. Because the SSI is still recent in its implementation, to date there is not a wide body of research examining the stakeholder

perceptions of the SSI and of their role in the decision-making process for student retention and promotion.

To this end, several interviews were conducted with teachers, with parents, and with campus or district-level administrators. The interviews served to gauge the stakeholder perceptions regarding their role in the grade placement committee itself as decision-makers and also their perceptions or their experiences regarding how often or likely students are to be promoted or to be retained in the context of the grade placement committee meetings. The participants also spoke about their views regarding the effectiveness of the SSI and the outcomes of its implementation. The research participants spoke to their personal experiences with student retention and promotion. The stakeholders' views range from the perception that the SSI puts students at risk of failure, actually causing students to be promoted more often to the opinion that the SSI does hold both the teacher and the parents more accountable for student success. Several broad themes emerged from the data. The themes of perceived power, underlying or unwritten agendas and a call for change due to dissatisfaction with the current system were evident upon the examination of the data.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions.....	7
Rationale	8
Operational Definitions.....	10
Summary	12
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Relevant Research on Retention	14
Relevant Research on Social Promotion.....	19
Student Populations Most Affected By Social Promotion and Retention	22
Appropriate Use of High-Stakes Assessment.....	26
Implementation and Interpretation of Educational Policies.....	29
Institutional Choice Theory	32
Summary	33
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	35
Introduction.....	35
Case Study Methodology	36
Schools in the Study.....	37
Developing the Case	38
Sample Identification Process.....	43
Research Participants.....	45
Collecting the Data	45

Interview Protocol.....	49
Triangulation.....	51
Researcher's Background.....	52
Conclusion	54
CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION	55
Introduction.....	55
Research Context	55
Campus A Information	56
Campus B Information	61
Participants.....	65
Teachers	66
Parents	67
Administrators	68
Interview Data.....	70
Stakeholder Experiences with Social Promotion or Retention Policies	70
Teacher Experiences	71
Parental Experiences	72
Administrative Experiences	73
Advantages or Disadvantages of Social Promotion and Retention	74
Research Question One: Stakeholder Understandings Regarding Social Promotion Law and Application at the Local Level	79
Research Question Two: Decision-making Mechanisms for Implementing Social Promotion Policies	81
Research Question Three: Teacher Concerns When Applying the Law	84
Research Question Four: Outcomes of the Implementation of Social Promotion Policy at the Local Level	87
Presentation of Data Summary	90
CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS	91
Emergent Themes	91
Perceived Power.....	93
Underlying/Unwritten Agendas	96

A Call for Change Due to Dissatisfaction with the System.....	100
Summary	103
Teacher Perceptions	103
Parental Perceptions	104
Administrator Perceptions	105
Unanticipated Themes	105
Conclusion	106
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH ..	108
Introduction.....	108
Research Purpose	108
Research Questions.....	109
Research Participants.....	109
Research Methods.....	110
Document Artifact Collection.....	110
Summary of Themes	113
Implications for Theory	113
Limitations of Institutional Choice Theory	116
Implications for Practice	117
Implications for Policy.....	118
Limitations	119
Future Research	121
Conclusions.....	122
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	124
REFERENCES	125
VITA.....	131

List of Tables

Table 4.1	Campus Demographics for 2005-2006: Campus A.....	57
Table 4.2	School Report Card Data: Campus A, Grade 3 Reading, Student Success Initiative Data.....	58
Table 4.3	School Report Card Data: Campus A, Grade 5 Reading (English and Spanish) Student Success Initiative Data	59
Table 4.4	School Report Card Data: Campus A, Grade 5 Mathematics (English and Spanish) Student Success Initiative Data	60
Table 4.5	Campus Demographics for 2005-2006: Campus B	61
Table 4.6	School Report Card Data: Campus B, Grade 3 Reading, Student Success Initiative Data.....	62
Table 4.7	School Report Card Data: Campus B, Grade 5 Reading (English and Spanish) Student Success Initiative Data	63
Table 4.8	School Report Card Data: Campus B, Grade 5 Mathematics (English and Spanish) Student Success Initiative Data	64
Table 4.9	Backgrounds Information for Teachers	66
Table 4.10	Demographic Information for Teachers.....	67
Table 4.11	Background Information for Parents	67
Table 4.12	Demographics Information for Parents.....	68
Table 4.13	Background Information for Administrators	69
Table 4.14	Demographic Information for Administrators	69
Table 4.15	Comparison of Research Participants' Backgrounds and Demographic Information (N=14).....	70

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived intended and unintended consequences of social promotion and retention policies for third and for fifth grade students. In this study of social promotion policies the goals are to describe, to understand and to explain the ways that these policies are implemented at the local level but are unable to prevent social promotion. This chapter outlines the legislation that led up to the social promotion policies in Texas, the purpose of the study, research questions, statement of the problem, significance of the study, operational definitions and limitations of the study.

Background

To understand the policies and the legislation that led to social promotion policy, specifically the origins in Texas itself and now nationally through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, an explanation of Senate Bill 4 and the Student Success Initiative must first be made. In 1999, Governor George W. Bush signed a law attempting to end social promotion in Texas. Senate Bill 4 is the legislation that instituted the promotional gates for in-grade retention and social promotion plans for students in grades three (3), five (5) and eight (8). In 1998, during a speech at a major educational administrators' conference called Midwinter Conference, then Governor George Bush gave a speech that included his views on eliminating social promotion in Texas. In his speech, he asserted:

Social promotion creates false hopes, fuels the drop-out rate, and destroys the dreams of too many Texas children. Social promotion undermines the integrity of our entire education system, because it pushes students from grade to grade even though they are not prepared to do the work-it hides the reason for their failures: poor reading skills...The voices of the status quo will say, Let's continue to ignore the problem. I say, Let's fix it. Let's heed the reading research that says the window of opportunity is grades K through 3...My plan says a child who does not pass the reading portion of the TAAS test in third grade must receive appropriate intervention and instruction before moving to regular classes in the fourth grade. The voices of the status quo will say, We can't hold back third graders-it will make them feel like failures. I say, They are failing today-let's stop pretending and start helping them. The best way to boost our children's self-esteem is teach them to read...Later, our children will be required to pass reading and math tests in third grade. But by that time only third graders with good skills will be promoted, ensuring greater success in the fifth and eighth grades. (Valenzuela, 2005, p.126 and 127).

It was after this speech that Governor Bush signed the perceived social promotion bill known as SB 4, or the Student Success Initiative, into law on June 8, 1999 (Valenzuela, 2005, p.127). It is significant to examine the impetus for this legislation since, then-Governor George Bush, now President George Bush, implemented similar social promotion and retention policies at the national level. Included in Senate Bill 4 was the Student Success Initiative, which remains the guidance for the state policy on social promotion.

This new law, entitled the Student Success Initiative (SSI), put into place several promotional gates for student achievement in grades three, five and eight. Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, the SSI requires students in third grade to pass the high-stakes assessment known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). According to this law, beginning in 2004-2005, fifth graders in Texas must pass both the reading and the math TAKS tests in order to be promoted to the next grade level. There is also a plan to place similar constraints on eighth grade students in the areas of reading and of math,

beginning in the 2007-2008 school year. SSI grade level students are given three opportunities to pass the TAKS test in reading or in both reading and math, depending on their grade level specific requirements. If after the third attempt students are not successful in passing the TAKS test, then a grade placement committee (GPC) is formed and to determine whether or not a student is promoted to the next grade level. If the GPC unanimously decides that the student will be successful with an accelerated instruction plan then the student may be promoted to the next grade level. The accelerated instruction plan may be as simple as a brief outlined plan for intervention in the areas of reading and or of math written on the GPC meeting deliberations notes. If the GPC determines that the student will not be successful then the student may be subject to in-grade level retention.

According to the Texas Education Agency's Grade Placement Committee Manual for 2006-2007:

Enacted by the 76th Texas Legislature (1999), the Student Success Initiative (SSI) grade advancement requirements currently apply to the Grade 3 reading test and the Grade 5 reading and mathematics tests. As specified by these requirements, a student may advance to the next grade level only by passing these tests or by unanimous decision of his or her grade placement committee that the student is likely to perform at grade level after accelerated instruction. The goal of the SSI is to ensure that all students receive the instruction and support they need to be academically successful in reading and mathematics. This effort depends greatly on schools, parents, and community members working in partnership to meet individual student needs (Texas Education Agency, 2007, p. 3).

This grade placement committee manual is the guiding tool used for meetings that determine whether students are promoted or if they are subject to in-grade retention due to failure of the TAKS test in either reading or a combination of reading and of

mathematics.

According to the Texas Administrative Code:

In addition to local policy relating to grade advancement, students in grades 3, 5 and 8 shall demonstrate proficiency in the subjects required by TEC §28.0211(a), in order to advance to the next grade. Demonstrated proficiency is defined under this section as meeting the passing standard on the appropriate assessment instruments specified by §101.2003(a) of this title (relating to Grade Advancement Testing Requirements) or on a state-approved alternate assessment authorized in §101.2011 of this title (relating to Alternate Assessment). A student who does not demonstrate proficiency as described in this section may only advance to the next grade if the student's Grade Placement Committee, as specified in §101.2007 of this title (relating to Role of Grade Placement Committee), determines by unanimous decision, in accordance with the standards for promotion established by the local school board, that the student is likely to perform at grade level at the end of the next year given additional accelerated instruction (Texas Education Agency, 2007, p. 3).

These key pieces of guidance were the focus of the examination of social promotion and retention policies and their implementation at the local level in Texas.

Statement of the Problem

According to the No Child Left Behind Act, the Student Success Initiative, the Texas Reading Initiative, the Texas Math Initiative and the grade advancement requirements as specified in the TEC and the TAC students in grades three and five who do not pass the TAKS test in Reading are subject to in-grade retention. Students in fifth grade are subject to retention if they do not pass the math portion of the TAKS test also. The problem is that research demonstrates that neither in-grade retention nor social promotion is beneficial in increasing student achievement as an academic intervention over time. Another major issue is that more often than not even students who do not pass the high-stakes assessment after three opportunities and whose cases are presented in the grade placement committee meetings are often promoted to the next grade level.

Essentially, the social promotion legislation is unable to prevent the social promotion of students.

These promotion and retention policies as mandated by the SSI do not seem to correspond with the reality of their implementation at the local level. Social promotion and retention policies are, at the local level, subject to the perception of the grade placement committee. These committees have been built into the SSI process in order to ensure that grade retention does not occur if it is inappropriate for a particular student. The problem, perceivably, is in the interpretation and the use of the policy in its administration. Through the grade placement committee meetings, the local school level is given the capability to make appropriate decisions about an individual student's progress and therefore to determine whether retention or social promotion are beneficial for an individual student's developmental needs.

There are various assumptions that are built into this SSI policy that can most aptly be described as safeguards. This policy assumes that the TAKS test is not an all-encompassing measure of a student's academic performance. For this reason, during the grade placement committee meetings other aspects of student performance such as their grades, their performance in other non-tested subjects, their prior retention, and their educational history, among other things, are considered and a plan for accelerated instruction is discussed and outlined. The SSI also assumes that the members of the grade placement committee meetings will make appropriate decisions for students based on their best educational interest. The SSI also, by giving the stakeholders at the local level the ultimate decision-making authority, assumes that local level personnel involved in grade placement committee meetings are capable of making appropriate retention and

social promotion decisions for individual students. This might also assume that individuals at the local level should have the right to make retention and social promotion decisions for their own students rather than depending solely on unilateral decisions made at the state level. This educational policy was created in order to reduce the numbers of socially promoted students but was written in a manner allowing safeguards so that students would not be inappropriately retained. The policy dilemma lies in the implementation and misinterpretation and use of the policy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is the examination of perceptions both of the intended and of the unintended consequences of social promotion and of retention policies, specifically for students in grades three and five. High-stakes assessment as a determinant of student in-grade retention or of promotion is an important issue as there is an overwhelming body of research that states their negative effects. “Neither social promotion nor holding kids back without help is a successful strategy for improving learning” (Feldman, 1999).

According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), social promotion is:

“... an insidious practice that hides school failure and creates problems for everyone— for kids, who are deluded into thinking that to be successful or get the message that achievement doesn’t count; for teachers who must face students who know that teachers demand hard work; for the business community and colleges that must spend millions of dollars on remediation, and for society the proportion of uneducated citizens, unprepared to contribute productively to the economic and civic life of the nation” (American Federation of Teachers, 1997, p. 3).

This legislated mandate contradicts some of the research findings by requiring retention based upon a high-stakes assessment. If the perceived purpose of this mandate is to prevent social promotion of students in grades three and five, then it is possible that in a

large number of Texas schools there are still many students who are, essentially, socially promoted. The forefront of this study was the examination of perceptions regarding social promotion and retention policies and the methods of their implementation at the local level. The varying perceptions of these policies are what guided the intended and the unintended consequences of this legislation at the local level. In order to address the issues of perceptions and of implementation or the interpretation of the Student Success Initiative, an examination of stakeholder perceptions was crucial to this research.

Research Questions

To gain a better understanding of the perceptions and both the intended and inadvertent consequences of social promotion and of retention policies, the data analysis and summary of the findings were based upon the following research questions:

1. What are teachers, parents, and staff understanding of the social promotion law when it comes to its application at the local level?
2. What decision-making mechanisms exist to implement social promotion policies?
3. What are teachers' significant concerns when applying the law?
4. What are the outcomes of the implementation of social promotion policy at the local level?

The research questions were answered through interviews, through analysis of school report card data provided by the Texas Education Agency, and through an examination of grade placement committee documents and meeting notes. An analysis of social

promotion policies and their consequences can be made to establish a connection between education policy and its implementation.

Rationale

This study has implications for understanding the connection between policy intentions and consequences of policy implementation. The findings of this research contribute to the conversation regarding social promotion and retention policies for educators, for lawmakers, for administrators and for other stakeholders so that they may be able to better establish policies for students' best academic benefit. According to the AFT social promotion "hides school failure and creates problems for everybody" (1997, p. 7). The AFT posits that social promotion causes problems "for kids, who are deluded into thinking they have learned the knowledge and skills necessary for success, who get the message that effort and achievement do not count, who often are denied access to the resources and support programs they need" (1997, p. 7). The importance of intervention for students who are struggling academically is emphasized. According to Shepard and Smith (1990), retention is an extremely costly practice that costs the country approximately \$10 billion each year (p. 87). The AFT contends that social promotion is also costly "for the business community, which must invest millions of dollars in teaching new employees the basic skills they did not learn in school" (1997, p. 7). The AFT estimates that taxpayers pay an estimated \$5,500.00 per student for an additional year of school, with no evidence as to the effectiveness of retention for these students (1997, p. 7). According to Thompson (1999), social promotion gives parents a false sense of progress, frustrates students while sending them a negative message, adds to already burdened teacher workloads, does not prepare students for the workforce, sends a

message to employers that diplomas are meaningless, and does not prepare students to become productive citizens in society. The AFT suggests that retention is as problematic as social promotion “for kids who often do not significantly improve their academic skills as a result of being retained, but instead may become alienated from school, develop emotional and behavioral problems, and be at greater risk of dropping out” (1997, p. 7). According to McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes (1999), policies which mandate social promotion or retention based upon a high-stakes assessment overwhelmingly affect students of color and students who are economically disadvantaged. Because social promotion and retention policies are costly from an economic standpoint, burden already stressful teacher workloads, do not prove to have academic benefits for students over time, and have been shown to actually increase the dropout rate; an examination of these policies must be made (AFT, 1997). The intentions of social promotion policies, such as the SSI, are aligned with the goals of increased student achievement; however, the policy in its practice does not align with its goals. This study provides a crucial contribution towards the conversation for the policy problems surrounding retention including: psychological and economic costs, ineffectiveness over time as an academic student intervention, increased dropout rates, lower rates of student achievement and disparate impact on socioeconomically disadvantaged students and students of color which are outlined in the literature review. This research examined the perceptions of stakeholders regarding social promotion and retention policies and this should shed some light as to the decision-making processes that determine the practice and the implementation in schools.

Operational Definitions

There are several key terms that must be defined in order for the reader to understand key pieces of social promotion legislation and policy. Many of these definitions have been paraphrased from the Glossary of the Academic Excellence Indicator System produced by the Texas Education Agency (2007). These definitions are often referred to by only their abbreviations in educational circles.

Student Success Initiative (SSI). This refers to the legislation that Governor George Bush signed into law in 1999 establishing, promotional gates for students in grades three, five, and eight. It requires them to pass a high-stakes assessment known as the TAKS test in reading for third grade students and in reading and in math for fifth and eighth grade children in order to achieve promotion to the next grade level (Texas Education Agency, 2007).

In-grade retention. This policy requires students to repeat the same grade level. This is what is often referred to as flunking (Solis & Romero, 2005). When students in grades 3 and 5 do not pass either the reading or the reading and the mathematics portion of the TAKS test, depending on their grade level requirement, then they are subject to in-grade retention.

Grade placement committee (GPC). This refers to the committee formed after a student has not passed the second administration of the TAKS exam and consists of the principal, a teacher in the area not mastered and the parent/guardian. The GPC creates an instructional plan for the student based on the student's needs (Solis & Romero, 2005). This committee is the decision-making body that determines whether or not a student is

retained or promoted after a student fails to pass the TAKS test required for their grade level.

Social promotion. This refers to the practice of passing students who have not mastered part, or all, of the grade-level curriculum on to the next grade with other students of their age (Solis & Romero, 2005). Social promotion is the concept that, then Governor George Bush targeted as the central consequence whose prevention served as the major impetus for creation of the Student Success Initiative.

TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills). The TEKS serve as the statewide framework for mandated curriculum in Texas public schools. The high-stakes assessment known as the TAKS is based upon these TEKS (Texas Education Agency, 2007).

TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills). The TAKS is the statewide mandated standardized exam. It measures the statewide curriculum per grade level and content area as follows:

Grade	TAKS Exams
--------------	-------------------

3	reading, mathematics
---	----------------------

4	reading, writing, mathematics
---	-------------------------------

5	reading, mathematics, science
---	-------------------------------

6	reading, mathematics
---	----------------------

7	reading, writing, mathematics
---	-------------------------------

8	reading, mathematics, social studies
---	--------------------------------------

9	reading, mathematics (Texas Education Agency, 2007).
---	--

The Spanish TAKS is also administered when necessary in the 3rd through 6th grades.

Satisfactory performance on the TAKS in the eleventh grade is prerequisite to a high

school diploma (Solis & Romero, 2005). Because students are subject to in-grade retention for not passing the TAKS test at certain grade levels, the test is often referred to as a high-stakes assessment.

Summary

A review of the literature regarding retention and social promotion is included in Chapter 2. This literature review specifically discusses the effects of retention and of social promotion on students, provides a closer examination of Senate Bill 4, and offers an explanation of the policy streams theoretical framework. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the methodologies employed in order to examine the disconnect between policy intentions and consequences of policy implementation. Chapter 4 presents the results of the interviews with teachers, parents, and administrators. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the data. Chapter 6 outlines conclusions based upon this research and suggests possibilities for further research in this area.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived intended and unintended consequences of social promotion and of retention policies for third and fifth grade students. In this study of a particular social promotion policy, the goals are to describe, to understand and to explain the ways in which these policies are implemented at the local level but how their results do not necessarily correlate with their intended implications. This chapter presents the literature both directly and indirectly related to social promotion. There is a variety of literature regarding social promotion and retention, which refutes either one of these solutions for academic intervention. A portion of the literature focuses on the negative effects of retention or of social promotion on the students themselves. Other literature enumerates the alternatives to social promotion and in-grade retention. According to Thompson and Cunningham,

“Overall, neither social promotion nor retention leads to high performance. If the goal is to bring low-performing students up to the higher standards now being asserted across the nation, neither retention nor social promotion is effective. In different studies, one or the other has been found to offer an advantage, but neither has been found to offer a large, lasting advantage, and neither leads to high performance” (2000).

Thomson and Cunningham (2000) argue that neither social promotion nor retention is the optimal tool for increased student achievement in public education. Because students are held to a standard on a high-stakes assessment as a determiner of their social promotion or their retention, an examination of the relevant research on social promotion and on retention ensued. The examination aided comprehension of the context by which students are held accountable to these standards in a high-stakes testing context.

Relevant Research on Retention

Much has been written about the effects that retention has on students, especially at the elementary level. “Although simply promoting students is not likely to enhance educational success, the confluence of research examining the effectiveness of grade retention on academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment does not support this strategy as an educational intervention” (Jimerson, et al., 2002, p.2). There is a large amount of research that details the negative effects of retention or of social promotion, respectively, but there is also research that finds the ineffectiveness both of social promotion and of retention as educational interventions. “Despite the current emphasis on grade retention as an educational policy designed to help low-achieving students, the majority of empirical studies suggest that grade retention typically does not benefit the students it is designed to help” (Walberg, Reynolds, Wang, 2004, p. 35-36). Walberg, et al. (2004) argue that retention is not beneficial for the students that are most affected by it. “With few exceptions, the existing literature finds moderately strong associations between grade retention and lower levels of later school achievement” (Walberg, Reynolds, Wang, 2004, p. 35-36). The research suggests that over time, retention does not seem to increase student achievement.

Bogden and Purnell (2000) posit, “A major study conducted by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) using nationally representative data from 1991-1994 found that the achievement differences between retained and promoted students did not improve. Repeating a grade did nothing to help retained students catch up to their peers” (p. 7). The research by Bogden and Purnell (2000) suggests that students who were retained were not able to make significant

academic gains as expected.

According to House (1989) with regard to retention, “It would be difficult to find another educational practice on which the evidence is so unequivocally negative” (p. 2). This same Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) report finds that “Fifty percent of students who repeat a grade do no better the second time, and twenty-five percent actually do worse the second time” (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p. 3). House (1989), Bogden and Purnell (2000) found that retention actually decreases student achievement in some instances. Bogden and Purnell (2000) found that “Dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than high school graduates. Repeating a grade twice makes the probability of dropping out nearly 100 percent” (p. 7). The research on retention seems to find that it contributes largely to the possibility of increased student dropout rates.

According to Schwager, Mitchell, et al., “By controlling the flow of low-achieving students through a system of mass compulsory education, retention practices give the appearance of accountability and enforcement of standards without intervening in the underlying problem, that of low student achievement” (Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell, Hecht, 1992, p. 435). This research suggests that other methods of student intervention are not explored to address the problem of low student achievement. Roderick, et al. (1999) conducted an analysis of the implementation of the first two years of the Chicago Public Schools’ intensive effort to end social promotion and to raise achievement in 1996, which showed that retention decreased academic progress and caused higher dropout rates. The research echoes the findings of House (1989), Bogden and Purnell (2000) and seemingly suggests that retention has some connection to

decreased academic achievement and even increased dropout rates for students.

However, the average of a later follow-up of the Chicago study (Roderick, Nagaoka, Bacon, & Easton, 2000) disclosed some additional negative results of retention. First, despite higher passing rates, retention rates have not fallen. This is due to the fact that, over the three-year study, fewer students are being socially promoted as a result of the stricter guidelines for promotion. Secondly, retained students are struggling in their second time to face the promotion policy because they still do not do well in the next tested grade. Finally, nearly a third of retained eighth graders in 1997 had dropped out by the fall of 1999 (Thomas & Stockton, 2003, p. 9).

This Chicago study found several negative effects of retention, including struggling students and a higher dropout rate. These findings indicate that retention is not effective in improving student achievement and even decreases student achievement in this sample.

There is also a wide body of research that describes the psychological detriment to students who are retained. House (1989) finds that “The effects of flunking are immediately traumatic to the children, and the retained children do worse academically in the future, with many of them dropping out of school altogether. Incredibly, being retained has as much to do with children dropping out as it does their academic achievement” (p. 209). According to Holmes, “Retention has an overall negative effect on affective concerns of retained children (1989). Students characterize retention as “flunking,” and those who have been retained are often reluctant to admit it” (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1985). According to Byrnes and Yamamoto (1985), students who are retained tend to have a lower self-concept because of it. The research offers that not only is retention psychologically costly for the students themselves, but also it is financially burdensome for the state as a whole.

According to Smith & Shepard (1985) a substantial body of research about the

effects of retention programs indicates clearly that retention is an enormously costly practice that doesn't work. "Retention is expensive, costing the country an average of \$10 billion every year. It is more cost effective to increase educational resources to improve student performance and thereby eliminate the need for retention at all"

(McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p.3). According to the AFT, retention is costly "for the business community and colleges that must spend millions of dollars on remediation, and for society that must deal with a growing proportion of uneducated citizens, unprepared to contribute productively to the economic and civic life of the nation" (AFT, 1997, p. 5). According to Thompson,

Retention is expensive — at a minimum, the cost of an additional year's schooling for each student retained. In 1994-95, over 32,000 North Carolina students who would otherwise have been retained were promoted after summer school. The state's costs for summer school and related remedial programs that year were about \$40 million. The additional cost of a full additional year of school for the students promoted after summer school would have been about \$150 million. Especially when viewed in the light of cheaper or more effective interventions, the combination of studies finding no advantage for retention, the studies pointing to harm from retention, and the tendency for gains from retention to wash out suggests that on the whole, retention is not a cost-effective response to poor performance. (Thompson, 1999, p. 5).

The research seems to suggest that retention is enormously costly as an academic intervention.

As an academic intervention, "Neither promoting students when they are unprepared nor simply retaining them in the same grade is the right response to low student achievement" (U.S. Department of Education, 1999, p.1-2). The U.S. Department of Education deemed that neither social promotion nor retention alone is the answer for addressing student achievement. "Retention adds to the likelihood of dropping out of school, above and beyond the influence of low achievement (Grissom & Shepard,

1989; Rice, Toles, & Schulz, 1986). The research indicates that educational policies mandating in-grade retention actually cause student educational failure, manifested through dropping out or basic low achievement. Little research to date has examined the role of school district policy in retention (Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell, and Hecht, 1992). School district policy, whether written or unwritten, provides an important insight as to how educational policies are implemented and interpreted.

In sum, the research on retention does not largely support it as an effective academic intervention. In general, the purpose of these traditional responses to improving retained students' achievement is to give them a larger dose of what failed to work the first time (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p. 6). As an academic intervention the research on retention is presented as giving students a double dose of instruction that was not effective in their previous school year. According to Houser (1999), "Several recent studies – purporting to show positive effects of grade retention – are in fact consistent with earlier findings that the academic benefits of retention typically are both temporary and costly" (p. 3). Houser's (1999) research outlined the economic and the psychological detriment that retention has on students. "When previous academic performance and relevant social characteristics are controlled, past grade retention accelerates current school dropout" (1999, p. 3). In the context of an accountability system and a high-stakes testing environment, it appears that an academic intervention that increased the dropout rate would be most ineffective and ultimately harmful. "There is no evidence for claims that new retention policies will be coupled with effective remediation of learning deficits that would be worth their cost or would offset the well-established long-term negative effects of retention" (Houser, 1999, p. 3).

The research on retention outlines the psychological and economic costs, the ineffectiveness over time as an academic intervention, the increased dropout rates associated with retained students, and the contribution of retention to lower student achievement. According to the overall research, retention is not widely supported as an effective method of academic intervention.

Relevant Research on Social Promotion

Though the literature regarding social promotion is not as overwhelmingly negative when compared to the research about retention, social promotion is not viewed in the research as a beneficial measure for students. Thompson posits, "Some evidence supports and little evidence disputes the indictment of social promotion" (1999, p.3). Much of the literature on social promotion focuses on the negative outcomes for students. Social promotion is often viewed, in the research, as a solution for the problem of student retention due to lack of achievement when, upon further examination of the literature, it may be just as detrimental for students. "Results of a recent opinion poll indicated that the majority of employers, professors, teachers and even students surveyed believed that it is much worse for students to be promoted to the next grade without having learned the needed skills than for them to repeat a grade" (Thomas, 2000, p. 326). The public perspective regarding social promotion is negative and in some cases viewed as worse than retention. "Retention rates are highly variable across states. Perhaps the most striking fact from this effort to bring together available data is that--despite the prominence of social promotion as an issue of educational policy--very little information about it is available" (Houser, 1999, p. 9). The limited research indicates that social promotion is not the panacea for low student achievement. "Parental pressure not to hold

their children back, combined with concern for students' social and psychological welfare, often leads to decisions to "socially promote" low-performing students" (Bogden and Purnell, 2000, p.6). According to Thompson with regard to social promotion and retention, "In different studies, one or the other has been found to offer an advantage, but neither has been found to offer a large, lasting advantage, and neither leads to high performance" (Thompson, 1999, p.3). Thompson posits that social promotion does not lead to high performance for students. These alternatives to test-based educational policies might include the appropriate use of high-stakes assessments. "Social promotion has a negative effect on student achievement and it assures failure by not making sure that students are prepared" (Rudolph, 1999, p. 2). This research suggests that social promotion does not adequately prepare students for the next phase of their education.

According to Bogden and Purnell, "many socially promoted students are not able to subsequently catch up, and they continue to fall further and further behind academically. Socially promoted students might put in the required amount of seat time and graduate from high school, but without acquiring the skills needed for a productive and satisfying life" (Bogden and Purnell, 2000, p.6). Bogden and Purnell echo Rudolph's contention that social promotion does not academically prepare students. According to Thompson, "Critics of social promotion argue that it frustrates socially promoted students by placing them in grades where they cannot do the work, sends the message to all students that they can get by without working hard, forces teachers to deal with under-prepared students while they try to teach the prepared, gives parents a false sense of progress..." (1999, p.3). Thompson focuses on the perceptions of the various stakeholders involved in a student's social promotion. "School principals are often faced

with the uncomfortable choice of holding back students who are not achieving academic standards or allowing the students to progress to the next grade with their peers, hoping that the students' deficiencies can be made up somehow" (Bogden and Purnell, 2000, p.6). In their research, Bogden and Purnell find the perception of the administrator to be an important aspect in student social promotion decisions.

According to Thompson, "The indictment of social promotion is damning and the argument, persuasive. But no statistics are kept on social promotion. Nor is it possible to identify and track students who are socially promoted. So it is difficult to validate many of these claims through research" (Thompson, 1999, p.3). As with retention, school districts and states vary as to the means by which they maintain data regarding students who are socially promoted, making it difficult to cite statistics on those students.

According to Thompson, "districts that have ended social promotion do suggest that the education system could do substantially better by many students, to the delight of parents and employers alike, without appreciable increase in rates of retention. Further, most studies that challenge the elimination of social promotion do not defend the practice so much as say that retention has worse, far-reaching implications. In fact, some of the leading critics of retention agree that social promotion does little to help low-performing students" (Thompson, 1999, p.3). Again, social promotion and retention are often seen in the literature as ineffective means for student achievement. "Although the prevalence of social promotion is difficult to measure because few educators openly admit to the practice, evidence of the problem abounds" (Bogden and Purnell, 2000, p. 6). Though specific social promotion data is difficult to cite, Bogden and Purnell find it is still a problem. "For most students, the public education system is providing a solid foundation

for a productive and satisfying adult life. Yet too many young Americans are still being left behind academically despite an abundance of research and experience that tells us ‘what works’” (Bogden and Purnell, 2000, p.6). According to Stevens, Tuck and Zimmerman, “In a 1995 survey by the Texas Federation of Teachers, 70 percent of elementary teachers and 61 percent of middle and high school teachers stated that a high percentage of students who failed their classes were promoted to the next grade” (1999). The research on social promotion outlines this intervention as a problem, as not preparing students academically, as contributing to low student achievement, as being an ineffective intervention for academic achievement, and as sending negative messages to stakeholders about student progress.

Student Populations Most Affected By Social Promotion and Retention

According to a policy brief by IDRA (1999), “Retention rates for Hispanic students and African American students are over two and a half times higher than the rate for White students. In Texas, one out of six ninth grade students repeats that grade every year. This rate is twice as large as any other grade and continues to rise” (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, p.4). According to Houser, “Retention rates are much higher for boys and members of minority groups than for girls or the white majority” (1999, p. 3). The research by Houser (1989) and McCollum et al. (1999), suggests that retention affects students of color at a higher rate than that of White students. Much of the research examines the manner by which students of color are adversely impacted by retention. These have inordinately severe effects on low-income and on minority students (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p.6). The research frequently recognizes the effect of retention on minority and on socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Therefore students of color may be adversely impacted by social promotion or by retention policy more often than other student groups.

According to Bogden and Purnell (2000), “A troubling fact is that retention is disproportionately applied to certain types of students. The literature on grade retention presents a fairly consistent portrait of the students who are most at risk of being retained in grade: males, minority students, students from lower socio-economic homes, students with disabilities, and students with poor health conditions” (p. 7). For this reason it is important to examine campuses that have student populations with demographics most often represented in the retention research. “According to 1996 population statistics from the U.S. and Evaluation Service, retention is more than twice as likely among boys as among girls and more than twice as prevalent among African American students as among white students” (Bogden and Purnell, 2000, p. 7). According to Bogden and Purnell other factors found to be associated with being retained are a large family size, a mother with low educational attainment, a single parent home, a lower household income, a parent with “lower occupational prestige,” a high rate of family mobility, participation in the Title I or Head Start programs, attendance in a high-poverty school, and living in the South (Bogden and Purnell, 2000, p. 8). Many of these factors represented in the literature were integral in selecting the campuses to be examined in this case study on social promotion and on retention.

According to Thompson and Cunningham (2000), “Retention is common. Nationally, no statistics are kept on retention, but reasonable estimates based on census data suggest that as many as one-third of all students have been retained at least once by the time they reach high school.” The research suggests that because states are

inconsistent in the manner in which they maintain retention data, it is difficult to obtain precise statistics regarding retention. “For boys and minorities, retention is even more common. Nationally, by high school, the retention rate for boys is about ten percentage points higher than for girls. In the early grades, retention rates are similar among whites, African Americans, and Hispanics, but by high school, the rate is about fifteen percentage points higher for African Americans and Hispanics than for whites.” (Thompson and Cunningham, 2000). The research by Thompson and Cunningham (2000) and Bogden and Purnell (2000) frequently cites the impact of social promotion and of retention policies on socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority students.

The students who are most often affected by social promotion and retention continue to be the Latino and African American students in Texas. According to the AFT, “poor achievement of students, particularly inner-city, minority youth persists, and today the pendulum is again swinging back to retention as the best response to student failure” (AFT, 1997, p. 8). According to a report by IDRA, “African American students and Hispanic students are retained at twice the rate of White students” (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, pg 3). In Texas specifically, “Retention rates for minority students (Hispanic and African American) are over two and a half times higher than the rates for White students. Economically disadvantaged students (5 percent) are more likely to be retained than are non-economically disadvantaged students (3.5 percent)” (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p.4). “Children of minority status, particularly African American males, are classified most often as low ability, make up the majority of special education students, and are the most frequently retained ethnic group (Ogbu, 1994). Upon review of the relevant research, retention is a significant problem in

Texas for students of color as well as for students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

As a whole, House (1989) found that “Students are retained in rather arbitrary and inconsistent ways, and those flunked are more likely to be poor, males and minorities, although holding students back is practiced to some degree in rich and poor schools alike” (p. 209). One study found that retention is “Far from stimulating students to perform “at standard,” being overage for grade gnaws away at students' sense of efficacy, with the impact especially severe for African-American students” (Spurlock, Munford, and Madhere, 1995). Test-based promotion policies leave behind disproportionate numbers of poor, Black and Hispanic children (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p.10). The research on the retention of students is consistent in representing the disparate impact on minority and on socioeconomically disadvantaged students. It is assumed that the student has total control over the learning situation, and the failure to learn is attributed to student negligence or unwillingness to do so (Cárdenas, IDRA, 1995). This research indicates that there is a perception that the student is solely to blame for their failure to learn. As with many other school practices which sort students, grade retention disproportionately impacts low-income and minority students and, in most cases, reduces their future opportunities to lead productive lives (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p.19). A study by McCoy and Reynolds (1998) found that socioeconomic status, gender, and race played a role in retention decisions in the students and the campuses that they studied.

Gender, race, and socioeconomic status also have a role to play in the issue of retention. McCoy and Reynolds (1998) used data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study of 1,164 low-income, mostly African American 14-year-old students who

had all attended a federally funded kindergarten program. Retained children were most likely to be boys and most likely to have lower scores in reading and mathematics achievement (Thomas and Stockton, 2003, p. 8).

Retention often affects boys and minority students, according to the research. For minority, disadvantaged and other atypical students, retention can be perceived as punishment for being atypical rather than punishment for lack of effort (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999, p.23). “In particular, English language learners are among the student populations most at-risk for school failure (August & Hakuta, 1997) and grade retention” (Slavin & Madden, 1999). The research presented cites the disparate impact that retention has on boys, on minority students and on socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Appropriate Use of High-Stakes Assessments

According to Thompson and Cunningham, “Sound decisions require multiple assessments. The decision to promote a student should not be made on the basis of a single test, and especially not a single administration of a single test. Therefore, provisions should be made for students to take accountability tests more than once if necessary and for local educators to use additional evidence in making promotion decisions” (2000). Thompson and Cunningham discern that students should have multiple opportunities to take accountability tests. “Standards developed by several professional societies condemn use of a single administration of a single assessment to make any high stakes decision, instead encouraging the use of several sources of evidence in making such decisions” (Thompson and Cunningham, 2000). Thompson and Cunningham take issue with the practice of using a single administration of only one assessment to make high stakes decisions. The research also suggests using a variety of

sources of evidence as a barometer in high-stakes decision-making committees.

Hauser “noted that the consequences of high stakes testing are often “either/or”—that is, pass or fail, be promoted or not—but that doesn’t have to be the case” (Hauser, 2004, p. 13). This research suggests that in some instances the consequences of high stakes testing are promotion or retention. According to Hauser, “some educational practices are typically bad for students. These include placement in typical low track classes and simple retention in grade...Neither tests nor any other type of information should be used to make such decisions. Unfortunately, no one is paying attention to that” (Hauser, 2004, p. 13). Research finds the use of tests in retention or in tracking decisions to be negative for students.

According to Houser, “the current enthusiasm for the use of achievement tests to end social promotion raises three concerns. First, much of the public discussion and some recently implemented or proposed testing programs appear to ignore existing standards for appropriate test use (National Research Council 1998: Ch. 6)” (Houser, 1999, p. 7). This research focuses on the importance of using standards for appropriate testing use. Houser posits, “There is persuasive research evidence that grade retention typically has no beneficial academic or social effects on students. The past failures of grade retention policies need not be repeated. But they provide a cautionary lesson: Making grade retention--or the threat of retention--an effective educational policy requires consistent and sustained effort” (1999, p. 7). Retention policies need to adhere to appropriate test standards requirements in order to be effective according to Houser. Although the SSI has been in place since 1999 it will require sustained examination and effort in order to assess its effectiveness as a policy for student success.

"The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, created by the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, present a number of principles that are designed to promote fairness in testing and avoid unintended consequences" (APA, 2006). The APA stresses the importance of promoting fairness in testing and avoiding unintended consequences. Some of the standards "include: Any decision about a student's continued education, such as retention, tracking, or graduation, should not be based on the results of a single test, but should include other relevant and valid information" (APA, 2006). The APA suggests the importance of utilizing relevant information in student placement decisions rather than just a single test. According to the APA, "When test results substantially contribute to decisions made about student promotion or graduation, there should be evidence that the test addresses only the specific or generalized content and skills that students have had an opportunity to learn. For tests that will determine a student's eligibility for promotion to the next grade or for high school graduation, students should be granted, if needed, multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of materials through equivalent testing procedures". The research suggests the importance of giving students multiple opportunities to show their mastery of content before making promotion decisions. "When a school district, state, or some other authority mandates a test, the ways in which the test results are intended to be used should be clearly described. It is also the responsibility of those who mandate the test to monitor its impact, particularly on racial and ethnic-minority students or students of lower socioeconomic status, and to identify and minimize potential negative consequences of such testing" (APA, 2006). The problem as suggested by the APA, lies

with the disconnect between the ways in which the test is intended to be used and the decision-making mechanisms which determine how these tests will impact students. The APA suggests that the stakeholders and policymakers are charged with ensuring that students are not subject to negative consequences of testing. According to some of the research cited previously social promotion can be seen as a negative consequence and retention can be seen as a negative consequence.

According to the APA, “Because the stakes are so high for so many students, additional research should begin immediately to learn more about the intended and unintended consequences of testing in educational decision making” (2006). For this reason an examination of the educational decision making processes regarding the SSI was made and stakeholder input is a crucial piece to this research. According to the APA, the purposes of standardized tests should not be tied to high stakes, students should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of content, negative consequences of testing for students should be minimized, especially with regard to minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, fairness should be promoted, and relevant student information rather than only testing should be considered in student promotion and retention decisions.

Implementation and Interpretation of Educational Policies

According to Jimerson, “NCLB emphasizes scientifically based interventions; however, the extant empirical evidence appears to contraindicate grade retention. Educational professionals are expected to consider contemporary research that supports effective interventions to promote the success of students.” (2002). Jimerson stresses the importance of utilizing research to support effective interventions for student success.

This research seems to suggest that the empirical evidence does not support retention.

The focus of this research explored the mismatch between the educational policy mandate in the Student Success Initiative and the implementation and use of the policy as a consequence of the decision-making mechanism set by the grade placement committee. “Unfortunately, there is often a disparity between research, policy, and practice, such that educational policy and instructional strategies do not necessarily follow from what has been empirically shown to be effective” (Jimerson, 2002). This disparity that Jimerson posits may be the problem with educational policies and their implementation. “District policy can shape procedures and establish criteria used in retention decisions. School districts differ in the extent to which they exercise control over these aspects of student retention. Thus, policy differences can be expected to contribute to differences in retention rates” (Schwager, Mitchell, Mitchell, and Hecht, 1992). This research stresses the importance of district policy on shaping or controlling retention decisions. “It is possible to strengthen the connection between research and practice by recognizing that educational professionals who are knowledgeable of educational research are those best prepared to implement effective strategies to maintain high standards and facilitate student success” (Jimerson, 2002). Jimerson recognizes the importance of giving stakeholders the trust to make effective decisions for student success. The educational professionals at the local level are in essence given the trust to make decisions regarding student retention and promotion. With regard to the convergence of state and district policies, the interpretation of the policy and the ways in which the policy is implemented locally may vary according to stakeholder knowledge or district policy controls.

According to Schwager, Mitchell, et al., “The amount of work effort involved in

policy implementation has two components: procedural or administrative work and programmatic or child-remediation work.” This research presents two important aspects of policy implementation for Schwager, Mitchell, et al. “Administrative work results from elaborating the retention decision-making process to include such policy provisions as identifying individuals who must be involved or consulted, requiring communication with parents, and specifying the number and character of meetings” (Schwager, Mitchell, et.al, 1992, p. 424). Schwager, Mitchell, et al., stress the effectiveness of committee meetings as a provision in this administrative work portion of policy implementation. These meetings also include deliberations, discussions of student performance according to various measures, levels of progress, and consultations with teachers, with parents, and with other auxiliary school personnel. “These mandated decision-making processes can be expected to affect retention-decision outcomes. Complex consultation expands the work effort and probably redefines the basis for decision-making. This may be especially true when the judgments of a team of professionals are used without reliance on a test-based standard” (Schwager, Mitchell, et al., 1992, p. 424). According to the research, the decision-making process itself is likely the most important factor in the interpretation and the use of an educational policy. Consultation and communication with various school stakeholders is also an integral aspect in the decision-making for student retention and for promotion.

The convergence of local, state, and federal policy is another critical component of the conversation surrounding social promotion and retention policies. Paul Light writes about the various policy streams that often come together in the implementation of a policy. Policy creation involves varying participants at various levels. According to

Light,

The central feature of Kingdon's model is the notion of three streams flowing through the policy system and consisting of problems, policies, and politics. The problem stream contains information about policy problems. Information comes from sources such as indicators, dramatic events or crises, and feedback from existing programs. Many actors in the media and government are constantly gathering information on conditions that may represent problems. These actors seek to identify the existence of conditions, potential consequences of conditions, and trends in conditions over time. Kingdon also points out the fact that these studies are not generally used to determine whether or not a problem exists, but rather to examine the magnitude of, or changes in, an already existing problem. Finally, according to Kingdon, problems can be illuminated through feedback which comes from systematic monitoring of programs, complaints, and casework, and through the daily bureaucratic administration of programs (McLemore, 2002).

The varying policy streams in which the government engages continue to be a mitigating factor in educational policies. The government as an actor in educational policy and said policies' application at the local level are at the forefront of Kingdon's model for policy streams. An exploration of literature regarding the state government as an actor in educational policy is needed.

Institutional Choice Theory

The convergence of state, district and local level policy is an important issue regarding social promotion and retention policies and the ways in which these policies are implemented and are interpreted. Clune offers that the theoretical framework of "institutional choice" has "two advantages for research on educational policy: It predicts and clarifies significant issues in educational policy, including issues growing out of the recent wave of state reforms; and it suggests significant issues for future research" (1987, p. 1). Institutional choice serves as the framework by which to examine the state reform of the Student Success Initiative as an educational policy. According to Clune, "the recent state reform movement in education, whatever its substantive goals, also involved

various institutional choices, most obviously the choice of state government as an actor in educational policy” (Clune, 1987, p. 1). Clune contends that in many educational reforms, the state government is serving as an actor in educational policy. “District policies often piggyback on state actors in centralizing activities” (Clune, 1978, p. 7). Institutional choice is a framework by which educational policies can be examined conceptually, according to Clune; however, there is an issue of distrust in institutional choice, often aimed at decision-makers (1978, p. 118).

There are three main tenets of institutional choice. The first, again according to Clune, is the basic institutional choice, which is “the new allocation of authority in each policy area, and the source of the allocation (in effect, the choice and the chooser)” (1987, p. 120). The second tenet of institutional choice is rationale and comparative institutional analysis. This is “the sense of institutional distrust of the old decision-maker and the sense of comparative advantage of the new decision-maker” (1987, p. 120). The last tenet of institutional choice is the instability of the choice itself. Clune offers, the instability lies in “reasons why the choice is close, uncertain, and difficult, and therefore why the choice is likely to be modified” (1987, p.120). Clune’s notion of institutional choice as a framework for examining educational policy provided a lens by which to view the SSI in this research.

Summary

Educational policies regarding student retention and promotion present a policy problem that lies in the convergence of state and district policies, in the interpretation of the policy and in the ways in which the policy is implemented at the local level. Mandating these types of policies based upon a high-stakes assessment contradicts the

very philosophies underlying their intentions, according to the guidelines specified by the American Psychological Association. “Neither retention in grade nor social promotions constitute an adequate response. The ideal response lies in determining and addressing reasons for the poor school performance of such a large segment of the student population ” (Cárdenas, IDRA, 1995). The strengths of this study are the void it fills between the perceived intention of the current social promotion and retention policies and the reality of what occurs at the local level, due to district policy and to stakeholder perceptions in the decision-making process. The weaknesses of this study are that the varying stakeholder perceptions largely affect the ways in which educational policies are administered at the local level. The implementation of social promotion policies does not coincide with the intentions of the policy when examined at the campus level. This study examines an area of research that has not widely been explored regarding school district policy implementation and stakeholder perception on retention. For this purpose, stakeholder input regarding their perceptions of these educational policies gives a crucial perspective as to how and through what processes these policies are implemented at the local level.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the perceived intended and unintended consequences of social promotion and retention policies for third and fifth grade students. The focus of this study examined social promotion policies, while the goals were to describe, to understand and to explain the stakeholder understandings of the social promotion law at the local level, the decision-making mechanisms by which these policies are implemented, the teachers' significant concerns when applying the law, and the perceived outcomes of the implementation of social promotion policy and how it is unable to prevent social promotion. The study examined the convergence of state and district policies, whether written or unwritten, regarding decision-making mechanisms for student retention or promotion as well as educational policy interpretation and implementation and their use. The study explored the percentages of students who are socially promoted or retained on campuses of similar demographic makeup in the same school district through an examination of data at the campus and state level regarding percentages of students who are socially promoted or retained in grades three and five, disaggregated for race, for ethnicity, for language, or for socioeconomic status. This data was primarily obtained through the analysis of the annual School Report Card Reports that are produced by the Texas Education Agency (2007). The use of the state level data served as a reflection on the case studies of the elementary campuses. In the interpretive tradition this study included interviews, the examination of artifacts and documentation, and case studies of specific elementary campuses of similar demographics. In the critical and political tradition, an exploration developed regarding inequalities potentially

reproduced within certain student populations, such as students of color or who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The critical policy analysis examines the economic, the psychological and the social perspectives. The educational policies regarding student retention and promotion in the SSI present a policy problem that lies in the convergence of state and district policies, the interpretation of the policy and the ways in which the policy is implemented at the local level.

Case Study Methodology

An integral aspect of this study was the component of case study methodology in the examination of specific elementary campuses. Heck (2004) states that, “case study as a research design focuses on understanding contemporary phenomena within their real settings where the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not evident (Yin, 1989)” (p. 218). The origins of case study methodology can be traced back to the early 1900’s in the United States. Much of the literature about the origin of case studies credits The University of Chicago Department of Sociology for its contribution to this field. (Tellis, 1997). There was a wealth of material to be studied in Chicago, as it was a period fraught with immigration to the United States; various aspects of immigration of different national groups to the rapidly growing city were studied and reported (Hamel et al., 1993). Fittingly many of the pertinent issues studied in the early days of case study methodologies continue to be evaluated in this particular study due to of the very nature of the student populations chosen for examination. These students’ issues include low socioeconomic status, ethnicity, language and other diverse aspects of the student populations, which were taken into consideration when analyzing the various stakeholder perceptions represented. Because the stakeholder perceptions regarding social promotion

and retention policy were such an integral aspect of this research, case study methodology was employed in order to more closely examine the two campuses in which the stakeholders have various roles. Selected for the study because of their high populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged and of minority students, these two campuses are consistent in their student demographics and therefore comparable. Specifically the research showed that the populations of students most often affected by social promotion and retention tend to be students of color and who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. For this reason these campuses were chosen for the case study. When these two cases are compared to the state level data, the percentages of students who are socially promoted after failing to meet passing standards on the TAKS test are consistent with each other.

Schools in the Study

This study focused specifically on two elementary campuses in the same school district with similar student population demographics. A series of open-ended and focused interviews were conducted with educators, parents, and other school personnel both at the campus and district level. The campuses chosen have high populations of students who are economically disadvantaged, based upon their free and reduced-price lunch status. These campuses are also bilingual campuses that have high numbers of students of color, specifically Latino(a) students. The guiding factor and assumption in the selection of these campuses is that the majority of the students who are retained come from families in the lowest ranges of income. (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Jimerson, 2001). As previously stated, students of color and students from

low socioeconomic backgrounds continue to be the most adversely affected by social promotion and retention policies and therefore they are the focus for this particular study.

Developing the Case

According to Heck, “the case starts with the problem, its definition, and the rationale behind the selection of the design” (2004, p. 218). These three steps are the first part of developing the case. “It is important to have a clear understanding of the policy problem and the issues involved, because decisions will have to be made during the course of data collection and analysis as the study proceeds” (Heck, 2004, p.218). In this specific instance the problem stems from the mismatch between policy intentions and the actual policy consequences regarding social promotion. First the study’s purpose and research questions must be established, followed by the scope and the boundaries of the study, and then the researcher should consider whether previous research and existing theory should be used prior to actual data collection (Heck, 2004, p.219). As suggested, these methods were employed in this study.

According to Hamel (1993), case study methodology has often been criticized as poorly founded. The advancement of more quantitative methods contributed largely to this review. As early as the 1960’s researchers began to explore the limitations of quantitative methodology. These limitations invoked a renewed interest in case studies as a means to obtain a more rich research methodology.

A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion. The goal of the study should establish the parameters, and then should be applied to all research. In this way, even a single case could be considered acceptable, provided it met the established objective (Tellis, 1997).

Hamel and others contend that “Case study can be seen to satisfy the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining” (1993). In this particular study of social promotion policies the goals are to describe, understand and explain the ways that these policies are implemented at the local level but do not necessarily match their intended consequences. To this end the perceptions of the various stakeholders on the two campuses selected were an important aspect to the research as they could convey their understandings about social promotion and retention policies.

Yin, Stake and others give numerous examples of applications of the case study methodology. The use of case studies proves particularly useful in the realm of education because of the evaluative nature of its application. Case studies have often been applied to the disciplines of law and medicine though they still have useful applications for education. “However, there are some areas that have used case study techniques extensively...in evaluative situations. The evaluative applications were carried out to assess the effectiveness of educational initiatives. Yin posits that the body of literature in case study research is "primitive and limited" (Yin, 1994). Perhaps this is why researchers in other, unrelated fields so often reject case study methodology.

The requirements and inflexibility of the latter forms of research make case studies the only viable alternative in some instances. It is a fact that case studies do not need to have a minimum number of cases, or to randomly "select" cases. The researcher is called upon to work with the situation that presents itself in each case. (Tellis, 1997).

In order to more accurately capture the lived experience of a phenomenon in education, such as social promotion or retention, case study research becomes necessary. For this reason case study methodology was the tool for this study.

According to Tellis, case studies can be single or multiple-case designs, where a multiple design must follow a replication rather than sampling logic (1997). A researcher is forced to use single case design when there are no other cases to replicate. Yin (1994) pointed out that generalization of results, from either single or multiple designs, is made to theory and not to populations (Tellis, 1997). Multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the pattern-matching, thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory (Tellis, 1997). This research included two cases in an effort to increase this confidence and robustness of theory lauded by Tellis.

There have been several examples of ways in which case studies have been used effectively. According to Tellis, the effects of community-based prevention programs have been widely investigated using case methodology (1997).

Where the high risk youth studies assumed a single case evaluation, these studies have typically used a collection of cases as a multiple-case study. This has been true in the various substance abuse prevention programs that are community-based (Holder, 1987; Sabol, 1990; Yin, 1993). Numerous such studies sponsored by the U. S. General Accounting Office are distributed in the literature between Evans (1976) and Gopelrud (1990). These studies have gone beyond the quantitative statistical results and explained the conditions through the perspective of the "actors" (Tellis, 1997).

In the case of the examination of the "actors" regarding social promotion and retention, it is necessary to move beyond solely quantitative methods since the perceptions and level of understanding of the stakeholders is a key element in the study. Thus case study evaluations encompass both process and outcomes, because they can include both quantitative and qualitative data (Tellis, 1997). Because case studies can include mixed methods of research, they provide a more rich body of data and analysis.

According to Yin (1993) there are several suggestions for a general approach to designing case studies, and also recommendations for *exploratory*, *explanatory*, and *descriptive* case studies. “Each of those three approaches can be either single or multiple-case studies, where multiple-case studies are replicatory, not sampled cases” (Tellis, 1997). According to Tellis, the field of education embraces the case method for instructional use (1997). It is in this same spirit that case study methodology has been selected to examine the perceptions surrounding social promotion policies at the campus level.

Exploratory case studies seek to identify a process and make some initial guesses about how it works, according to Heck (2004, p.219). In *exploratory* case studies, fieldwork, and data collection may be undertaken prior to definition of the research questions and hypotheses (Tellis, 1997). Selecting cases is a difficult process, but the literature provides guidance in this area (Yin, 1989a). Stake (1995) recommended that the selection offers the opportunity to maximize learning, knowing that time is finite.

Again according to Heck, explanatory cases have as a goal the explanation of why a certain set of events may have occurred-perhaps even identifying a set of causes and effects (2004, p.219). Explanatory cases are suitable for doing causal studies. In very complex and multivariate cases, the analysis can make use of pattern-matching techniques (Tellis, 1997).

According to Heck, descriptive cases focus on describing a policy phenomenon, such as the manner in which a policy was developed or implemented (2004, p.219). *Descriptive* cases require that the investigator begin with a descriptive theory, or face the possibility that problems will occur during the project (Tellis, 1997). This particular

methodology is well suited for and has been used in education. Pyecha (1988) used this methodology to study special education, using a pattern-matching procedure (Tellis, 1997). In Pyecha's study several states were studied and the data about each state's activities compared to another, with idealized theoretic patterns (1988). Thus the implication in this type of study is the formation of hypotheses of cause-effect relationships (Tellis, 1997). In this particular type of case study the selection of cases and the unit of analysis is developed in the same manner as the other types of case studies.

Tellis asserts that case studies have been increasingly used in education (1997). According to Heck, "The researcher should also consider whether (and how) previous research and existing theory should be used prior to actual data collection. Previous studies can also help guide the data collection and strategies to use in data analysis (Yin, 1989), although some analytic approaches favor allowing data categories, themes and concepts to emerge from the data, as opposed to being structure by previous analyses" (Heck, 2004).

Yin (1994) recommended the use of case-study protocol as part of a carefully designed research project that would include the following sections: (a) Overview of the project (project objectives and case study issues), (b) Field procedures (credentials and access to sites), (c) Questions (specific questions that the investigator must keep in mind during data collection), (d) Guide for the report (outline, format for the narrative) (Yin, 1994, p.64). This is precisely the method employed to ensure a carefully designed project. The quintessential characteristic of case studies is that they strive for a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1990). "Cultural systems of action refer to sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social

situation” (Tellis, 1997). Stake emphasizes the importance of the presence of boundaries in case studies (Stake, 1995). Yin, Stake, Feagin and others contend that case study research is not sampling research. The authors do provide that when selecting cases, great consideration should be taken in order to maximize what is learned during the time allotted for the study.

The unit of analysis is a critical factor in the case study. It is typically a system of action rather than an individual or group of individuals. Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined (Tellis, 1997).

The value in case study research is that it provides a “multi-perspectival analyses. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristic that case studies possess. They give a voice to the powerless and voiceless.” (Tellis, 1997). In this case perhaps the voice of the student or of another stakeholder are left out of the decision-making process through the grade placement committee.

Sample Identification Process

For the purposes of this study a combination of convenience, purposive, critical case sampling and key informant sampling were employed. According to Marshall, convenience sampling “is the least rigorous technique, involving the selection of the most accessible subjects” (1996, p. 1). Convenience sampling was not the only identification process employed in this research. Marshall posits that there is an element of convenience sampling in many qualitative studies, but a more thoughtful approach to selection of a sample is usually justified (1996, p. 1). In this study most of the research

participants were chosen through convenience of accessibility to contact information for them and the proximity of their work environment.

Purposive sampling or judgment sampling as it is also known, was also employed in this research. According to Marshall purposive sampling “is the most common sampling technique” (1996, p. 1). “The researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question” (Marshall, 1996, p. 1). For this research teachers, administrators, and parents participated in the study based upon their expected contribution to the research questions.

According to Marshall, “It may be advantageous to study a broad range of subjects (maximum variation sample), outliers (deviant sample), subjects who have specific experiences (critical case sample) or subjects with special expertise (key informant sample). Subjects may be able to recommend useful potential candidates for study (snowball sample)” (1996, p. 1). In this study teachers and administrators as research subjects were asked to recommend useful potential parents who might be interested in participating in the study. Also, specific teachers, parents and administrators who have special expertise in the area of social promotion or of retention were sought to participate in the study. “During interpretation of the data it is important to consider subjects who support emerging explanations and, perhaps more importantly, subjects who disagree (confirming and disconfirming samples)” (Marshall, 1996, p. 1). Although many of the research participants supported emerging explanations in the interview process, others disagreed, disconfirming samples; this analysis will be further explained in Chapter 4 through the explanation of the results.

Research Participants

For the initial portion of the study the elementary campuses that were selected for the data analysis have similar demographic compositions with regard to resources, size, student populations, and personnel. Open-ended interviews were conducted with various campus and district personnel. Educators with specific experiences either in third or fifth grade were desired for interviews. This included teachers with experiences giving instruction to students in their classroom and/or grade level who have been retained, socially promoted, or considered for retention. Other school and district personnel were asked about their experiences with and their perceptions of policies regarding retention and social promotion. The interviews with school personnel assisted in shedding some light as to the match or mismatch of the policies and the actual implementation or practice of retention and of social promotion. Parents of students currently under consideration for retention or who have had experience with retention or with social promotion in order to gauge their perceptions and understanding also participated in interviews. Teachers and school personnel inquired of several parents whether or not they would be interested in participating in this study and then accordingly obtained contact information for those parents. Once the parents professed interest in the study and agreed to be contacted by me they were called or emailed to schedule an interview.

Collecting the Data

Yin suggests that there are three key principles guiding the collection of data in case studies. (Heck, 2004). These principles include focusing on multiple sources of

information, creating a database for the case, and maintaining a chain of evidence (Heck, 2004). According to Stake (1995), and Yin (1994) there are at least six sources of evidence in case studies. These six sources include documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts.

Documents could be letters, memoranda, agendas, administrative documents, newspaper articles, or any document that is germane to the investigation. In the interest of triangulation of evidence, the documents serve to corroborate the evidence from other sources. Documents are also useful for making inferences about events; however, documents can lead to false leads in the hands of inexperienced researchers, which has been a criticism of case study research. Documents are communications between parties in the study, the researcher a vicarious observer; remembering this differentiation helped the investigator to avoid being misled by such documents (Tellis, 1997). In this study, documents such as grade placement committee deliberations, grade placement committee guidance manuals, other administrative documents, required letters regarding the TAKS test and legal requirements sent to inform parents of students about their child's performance, among other forms, contributed to the analysis of the implementation of social promotion policies at the campus level.

According to Tellis, archival documents can be: service records, organizational records, lists of names, survey data, and other such records (1997). In this particular study of social promotion policies such archival documents as information located in the Academic Excellence Indicator System from the Texas Education Agency assisted in evaluating the incidences of retention and of social promotion at Texas elementary campuses in general. Regarding archival documents, Tellis warns that, the investigator

has to be careful in evaluating the accuracy of the records before using them. Even if the records are quantitative, they might still not be accurate (1997). This caution was taken into consideration when examining archival documents from the Texas Education Agency.

According to Tellis, interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information (1997). Open-ended interviews involve key respondents, asked to comment about certain events. These types of interviews may propose solutions or may provide insight into events. Tellis and others deem it helpful to gather data from multiple sources and not to depend solely on one source of information (1997). In the focused interview the respondent is interviewed for a short period of time, usually answering set questions. Focused interviews are traditionally utilized in order to confirm data collected from another source. Structured interviews are similar to surveys in that the questions are developed in advance and are extremely detailed.

Direct observation occurs when a field visit is conducted during the case study. It could be as simple as casual data collection activities, or more complex formal protocol to measure and record behaviors (Tellis, 1997). A portion of this study focused on direct observation of stakeholders who are participants in a grade placement committee meeting through face-to-face interview. The only meetings that were cited in this study did not have children present; this constitutes the majority of the grade placement meetings. In this case, only the deliberations or the minutes from these meetings were used. Tellis believes this technique is useful for providing additional information about the topic being studied (1997). In case studies the reliability is enhanced when there is more than

one observer involved. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992) researchers should be “as unobtrusive as wallpaper.”

Participant-observation makes the researcher an active participant in the events being studied (Tellis, 1997). Participant-observation was an important aspect of the data collection in this study because of the nature of the researcher’s role. I, as the researcher, and also as an administrator in the school district where I conducted this study, am cognizant of the potential complications in the data collection due to my unique role as a participant in the grade placement committee process. As Tellis posits, the technique provides some unusual opportunities for collecting data, but could face some major problems as well. The researcher could well alter the course of events as part of the group, which may not be helpful to the study (1997). The limitations of the research are discussed in Chapter 6.

There were no physical artifacts collected during the course of this study. Tellis qualifies physical artifacts as tools, instruments, or some other physical evidence that may be collected during the study as part of a field visit. The perspective of the researcher can be broadened as a result of the discovery (1997).

Yin stresses that it is important to keep in mind that not all sources are relevant for all case studies (Yin, 1994). Yin also notes that the investigator should be capable of addressing all of them, should it be necessary, but each case will present different opportunities for data collection (1994). There are some conditions that arise when a case researcher must start data collection before the study questions have been defined and finalized (Yin, 1994). Yin contends that this is likely to be successful only with an experienced investigator. In this study of stakeholder perceptions regarding social

promotion and retention policies, various sources presented themselves as relevant for the research while others did not.

Interview Protocol

The interviews that were conducted relied heavily on a guide or protocol. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a better understanding of stakeholder understanding and perceptions of the policies regarding social promotion and retention in Texas. The interview protocol was developed in order to address the following research questions:

1. What are teachers, parents, and staff understanding of the social promotion law when it comes to its application at the local level?
2. What decision-making mechanisms exist to implement social promotion policies?
3. What are teachers' significant concerns when applying the law?
4. What are the outcomes of the implementation of social promotion policy at the local level?

Open-ended and focused interviews with individual parents, administrators, teachers, and other central administration personnel were conducted. Throughout the course of the interviews, if the researcher observed that the participant wished to provide more detailed responses, additional leading or probing questions were employed. Methods utilized in the study conducted by McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, and Montes were considered when conducting the stakeholder interviews.

Questions addressed to educators focused on issues such as factors that point to the need to retain a student; the efficacy of having a student repeat a grade; perceptions about promotion and retention policies; the process of retention decisions; alternatives to retention; ethical issues that accompany decisions to

retain or promote students; and whether retention achieves the outcomes sought (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999).

As parents were interviewed for the study, questions about the participants' experiences, including the nature of their involvement in discussions with teachers, with counselors, and with site administrators; whether they felt that retention effectively addressed the deficiencies that had prompted the discussions; and whether their own educational backgrounds and experiences had helped to shape their expectations were explored (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, Montes, 1999). As in previous research studies regarding retention and promotion, the goal of this research is “to understand the nuances of what our participants expressed about retention and the nature of parent involvement in decisions that accompanied a decision to have a student repeat a grade” (Akmal & Larsen, 2004).

An initial study (Larsen, 2002) focused on five school districts in western and eastern Washington. In that qualitative study, interviews with 20 educators, including teachers, principals, and central office administrators, probed retention practices at the elementary and middle levels. That study also examined ethical questions that educators consider when they participate in decisions in which a student's promotion to the next grade hangs in the balance (Akmal & Larsen, 2004).

A consistent theme emerging from the interviews corroborated earlier research (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Dutro, Collins, & Collins, 2002; Smith, Heinecke, & Noble, 1999) that suggests school district policies tend not to be informed by available research about the practice and the efficacy of retention. As there has been some previous research in the area of social promotion and of retention from the perspectives of school personnel, the methodology will be both useful and applicable to this study also. In addition there was a data-to-data comparison throughout the analysis. This study

examined some of these same retention issues, but solely at the elementary level. Upon completion, the interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to ensure absolute accuracy. Other documentation also was collected from the campuses such as grade placement committee deliberations, letters to parents or to students, accelerated instruction plans, etc. This additional documentation assisted in portraying a more complete understanding of retention and of social promotion practices on the elementary campuses being studied. The questions included in the interview protocol can be referenced in the appendix.

Triangulation

An important aspect of the case study is a triangulation of the data. Snow and Anderson (cited in Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991) asserted that triangulation can in fact occur with data, investigators, theories, and even methodologies (Tellis, 1997). Triangulation of the data assures a more reliable outcome and therefore a more accurate analysis of the results. Stake (1995) stated that the protocols used to ensure accuracy and alternative explanations are called triangulation (Tellis, 1997). The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes (Tellis, 1997). In case studies, this is possible when utilizing multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984). In this study of stakeholder perceptions regarding social promotion and retention policies, triangulation of data was the primary method of triangulation employed. “Data triangulation involves the use of different sources of data/information. A key strategy is to categorize each group of type of stakeholder for the program that you are evaluating. Then, be certain to include a comparable number of people from each stakeholder group in the evaluation study” (Guion, 2002, p. 1). A comparable number of people from each

perceived stakeholder group were identified for the interviews. Various stakeholder groups were interviewed and then their responses compared amongst each other in order to determine whether or not they agreed on certain enumerated aspects of the social promotion or the retention policies. Naturally, if the stakeholder responses were the same it could be derived that their perception or outcome was a true outcome. In this particular study of social promotion and retention, multiple sources of data were collected in order to ensure validity such as document artifacts, interviews, and an examination of state level data regarding social promotion and retention rates at the specific campuses selected.

The Researcher's Background

My experiences in education have been short in time but varied in setting. I began my educational career in Bryan I.S.D. as a Language Arts Facilitator for first and second grade students. The principal informed me that upon taking this new position, my primary responsibility would be accelerating the students in my class to the benchmark of their specific grade-level reading expectations. This experience proved all the more valuable as the populations of student served by our campus came from severely socioeconomically deprived communities. Several of my students were homeless, several of my students' parents were in prison, and most of my students came from impoverished homes of ethnic minority. Truly their childhoods were anything but idyllic. This time gave me my first glimpse of the profound impact that a truly involved, compassionate teacher can have on his or her students. Teachers of students in these special life situations have a unique opportunity to create a stable, fun, nurturing, yet academically-rich environment for students to escape the atrocities of the home front.

The next year I taught first grade in College Station I.S.D., a school district in close proximity to Bryan. While there, my experience included the amazing opportunity to instruct and to serve gifted and talented students, new English language learners as well as students with special needs. Several of my students' had parents who were international students attending Texas A&M University, while our campus also served students who lived in a low-income housing community near the school. The dichotomy between these students' lives was incessantly interesting. While some of our students' parents pursued their advanced degrees, other parents applied for scholarships to fund our field trips. This experience allowed me to teach students of all academic abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds as well as a diverse range of nationalities and even of languages. One year in my classroom I had four languages represented: English, Spanish, French, and Korean. After teaching for four years I decided that it was time for me to experience education at another level.

This desire for new perspective brought me to Austin to pursue this Ph.D. and I began working at the Texas A&M University System Partnership for Texas Public Schools. This partnership was a collaborative of the Texas A&M University System and the Texas Education Agency. Since our program was housed at the Texas Education Agency, I had the opportunity to experience education on varying levels of bureaucracy. I was able to interact with school personnel at the campus, district, and state level through my work as Coordinator of English Language Learner Programs. In this role I had the opportunity to oversee technical assistance programs at bilingual elementary schools all over Texas. Various universities within the Texas A&M University System would assign deans or professors to create innovative grants for English language learners at the

elementary level. One of my responsibilities was to oversee these technical assistance programs and, through the deans, monitor their progress. In my current role as an assistant principal I have best been able to observe and to experience the effects of the social promotion policies on the campus level. These observations stemmed mostly through my participation in grade placement committee meetings.

Conclusion

This purpose of this chapter was to outline the methodology that was employed in order to gather data for the research study. An explanation of case study methodology was given in addition to methods specific to this study, information regarding the participants and schools in the study, as well as information regarding the interview protocol and method for data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data collected in this research. Descriptive statistics were employed in order to compare the research participants. School report card data regarding the number of TAKS failers and percentages of promoted and retained students on the two campuses featured in this case study are also presented. The research participants' responses were coded utilizing grounded theory techniques.

Research Context

The two campuses selected for this case study are both included on the east side of an affluent Chapter 41 school district in Texas. This school district has twenty-seven elementary schools, five of which are currently bilingual campuses. With the growing numbers of Latino students moving into the area, there are plans to open more elementary schools as bilingual campuses as soon as the fall of 2007. The two campuses selected for this case study are of similar student demographic makeup, are both bilingual campuses and are in the same school district. Both campuses have high numbers of students of color as well as high numbers of students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Consequently, in order to best serve the bilingual students on just four campuses, the district examined in this case study implements "busing." For this reason, these campuses are not considered neighborhood schools. The students who attend these campuses may live anywhere in the school district but considering facilities, personnel and program resources, to be served in a bilingual program are bused to the campus which can best meet their needs. For the sake of keeping the participants and the

campuses confidential, are referred to as Campus A and Campus B. All of the research participants are teachers, administrators or have children who attend one of these two campuses. The following tables represent the most recent demographic data available for these two campuses. The data was acquired through the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System (2007).

The two campuses examined in this case study have large numbers of students who are socially promoted after failing to meet state standards for passing the TAKS test. The following tables chronicle the rates of TAKS failers promoted by a grade placement committee in third and fifth grade, the percentage of students retained, percentage of students requiring accelerated instruction, and percentage of students promoted who met the passing standard for TAKS. It is important to note that for grade three students, the SSI promotional gates only went into effect for the subject of reading in 2003 and therefore they have two data points, one in 2004, and one in 2005. For grade five students, the SSI promotional gates went into effect in 2005 for the subjects both of reading and of math; therefore they have one point from which to draw data. The 2006-2007 school year will provide their second data point, available at the end of May 2007.

Campus A Information

Campus A is a bilingual campus with 655 total students. Of the total student population 535 are Hispanic, 35 are African American, and 79 are White. The percentage of Hispanic students on Campus A is much higher than the average of Hispanic students on other campuses for the state. There are six students on the campus who are classified as Asian. Table 4.1 outlines the demographics for Campus A.

Table 4.1

Campus Demographics for 2005-2006: Campus A

	Count	Percent	Campus Group	District	State
Total Students:	655	100.0%	24,994	37,767	4,505,572
African American	35	5.3%	6.0%	10.3%	14.7%
Hispanic	535	81.7%	84.4%	23.4%	45.3%
White	79	12.1%	8.0%	56.1%	36.5%
Native American	0	0.0%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%
Asian/Pac. Islander	6	0.9%	1.4%	9.7%	3.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	549	83.8%	83.7%	24.9%	55.6%
At-Risk Population	488	74.5%	60.9%	31.2%	48.7%
Mobility Rate	150	27.4%	23.0%	17.8%	21.1%

Campus A has a large number of Hispanic students at 81.7% as well as a large number of students who are economically disadvantaged at 83.8%. The state averages for campus percentages of Hispanic students are 45.3%. Campus A has almost twice the number of Hispanic students as the state average. The state average of economically disadvantaged students is 55.6%. Again, Campus A has a much higher percentage of students who are on free or reduced lunch that meet this criterion. The at-risk population of this campus is 74.5%. This is significant for this study because as previously mentioned in the research by McCollum, Maroney, Cortez, and Montes (1999), Latino and African American students and students who are economically disadvantageous are the students most often affected by retention, especially in Texas. Campus B has similar student demographics.

In 2006 Campus A had 90% of the third grade students meet the passing standard for the TAKS reading test. In 2005 91% of the students in third grade met the passing standard for the TAKS test on Campus A for reading. The percentages of students who met the standard for the TAKS test in grade 3 reading are only slightly lower than the averages for the state. It is of importance to note that in all of the tables representing school report card data an asterisk indicates that results are masked due to small numbers to protect student confidentiality as defined by the Academic Excellence Indicator System (2007). Table 4.2 outlines the school report card data for Campus A in the area of third grade reading.

Table 4.2

School Report Card Data: Campus A, Grade 3 Reading, Student Success Initiative Data

Year	State	Dist.	Campus Group	Campus	Af. Amer	Hisp.	White	Male	Fem.	Econ Dis.	LEP
Students Requiring Accelerated Instruction											
2006	12%	5%	13%	14%	*	14%	<1%	12%	16%	15%	14%
2005	13%	6%	16%	18%	17%	20%	<1%	23%	14%	20%	21%
TAKS Cumulative Met Standard (First and Second Administration)											
2006	94%	98%	94%	90%	*	91%	>99%	93%	87%	89%	90%
2005	93%	98%	92%	91%	>99%	90%	*	83%	98%	90%	89%
TAKS Failers Promoted by Grade Placement Committee											
2005	49%	62.5 %	50%	83.3%	*	80%	*	*	*	80%	80%
2004	48.2%	50%	45%	60%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Promoted to Grade 4											
2006	38%	59%	50%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2005	56%	13%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Retained in Grade 3											
2006	86%	55%	>99%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2005	76%	88%	>99%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

For Campus A third grade reading, the percentage of students who failed TAKS but were promoted by the grade placement committee was 60.0% in 2004 and 83.3% in 2005. The campus percentages are significantly higher than the state averages of TAKS failers who are promoted by the grade placement committee. The state averages were 48.2% and 49% for 2004 and 2005, respectively. The percentage of students requiring accelerated instruction as decided by the grade placement committee meeting was 18% in 2005 and 14% in 2006.

In 2006 Campus A had 81% of their students meet the passing standard for the grade 5 reading TAKS test. In 2005 74% of the students in fifth grade met the passing standard for the TAKS reading test. Table 4.3 outlines the school report card data for Campus A, grade 5 reading in English and Spanish.

Table 4.3

School Report Card Data: Campus A, Grade 5 Reading (English and Spanish) Student Success Initiative Data

Year	State	Dist.	Campus Group	Campus	Af. Amer	Hisp.	White	Male	Fem.	Econ Dis.	LEP
Students Requiring Accelerated Instruction											
2006	20%	10%	23%	40%	*	46%	15%	49%	32%	49%	58%
2005	25%	13%	29%	31%	*	31%	31%	38%	24%	36%	44%
TAKS Cumulative Met Standard (First and Second Administration)											
2006	89%	96%	87%	81%	*	79%	85%	72%	89%	76%	72%
2005	86%	94%	87%	74%	*	75%	75%	69%	80%	70%	61%
TAKS Failers Promoted by Grade Placement Committee											
2005	69.9%	84.0 %	87.5%	86.7%	*	80.0 %	*	77.8 %	100.0 %	85.7 %	80.0 %
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Retained in Grade 5											
2006	68%	62%	80%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

For Campus A in grade 5 reading, the percentage of students requiring accelerated instruction was 31% in 2005 and 40% in 2006. The percentage of students who were TAKS failers but nonetheless promoted by the grade placement committee was 86.7% in 2005, which was the first year that the SSI promotional gate was applied to this grade level. This is drastically higher than the state average (69.6%) of TAKS failers promoted by grade placement committee. It is important to note that the state percentage of students who are promoted despite TAKS failure is still high indeed.

Table 4.4

School Report Card Data: Campus A, Grade 5 Mathematics (English and Spanish)

Student Success Initiative Data

Year	State	Dist.	Campus Group	Campus	Af. Amer	Hisp.	White	Male	Fem.	Econ Dis.	LEP
Students Requiring Accelerated Instruction											
2006	19%	9%	20%	38%	*	44%	17%	38%	39%	43%	51%
2005	21%	11%	20%	30%	*	31%	17%	28%	33%	32%	29%
TAKS Cumulative Met Standard (First and Second Administration)											
2006	90%	95%	88%	73%	*	69%	92%	68%	76%	68%	63%
2005	88%	95%	91%	84%	*	85%	92%	88%	81%	84%	79%
TAKS Failers Promoted by Grade Placement Committee											
2005	69.6%	79.7 %	80.0%	66.7%	*	*	*	*	*	66.7 %	*
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Retained in Grade 5											
2006	66%	75%	72%	64%	*	63%	*	51%	75%	62%	56%

For Campus A grade 5 mathematics, the percentage of students requiring accelerated instruction was 30% in 2005 and 38% in 2006. The state average for students receiving accelerated instruction was 21% in 2005 and 19% in 2006. The percentage of students promoted by a grade placement committee after not meeting the passing standard for

TAKS is commensurate with the state average with 66.7% for the campus and 69.6% for the state.

Campus B has similar student demographic information. Campus B has 516 total students, 386 of which are Hispanic. Campus B has 25 African American students, 93 White students, 3 Native American students, and 9 Asian students. Table 4.5 outlines the student demographic data for Campus B.

Campus B Information

Table 4.5

Campus Demographics for 2005-2006: Campus B

	Count	Percent	Campus Group	District	State
Total Students:	516	100.0%	21,427	37,767	4,505,572
African American	25	4.8%	6.6%	10.3%	14.7%
Hispanic	386	74.8%	74.8%	23.4%	45.3%
White	93	18.0%	17.1%	56.1%	36.5%
Native American	3	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%
Asian/Pac. Islander	9	1.7%	1.2%	9.7%	3.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	382	74.0%	77.3%	24.9%	55.6%
At-Risk Population	327	63.4%	56.5%	31.2%	48.7%
Mobility Rate	83	21.7%	21.4%	17.8%	21.1%

Campus B also has a large Hispanic population with 74.8%, much higher than the state average of 45.3%. This campus also has a high number of students who are economically disadvantaged at 74.0% as compared to the state average of 55.6%. The at-risk population of this campus, too, is much higher than the state at 63.4% when 48.7% is the reported state average.

In 2006 91% of the third grade students on Campus B met the passing standard for the reading TAKS test. In 2005 92% of the students met the passing standard for the grade 3 TAKS in reading. Table 4.6 outlines the school report card data for the grade 3 TAKS Reading test on Campus B.

Table 4.6

School Report Card Data: Campus B, Grade 3 Reading, Student Success Initiative Data

Year	State	Dist.	Campus Group	Campus	Af. Amer	Hisp.	White	Male	Fem.	Econ Dis.	LEP
Students Requiring Accelerated Instruction											
2006	12%	5%	14%	20%	*	24%	13%	25%	15%	18%	27%
2005	13%	6%	13%	17%	*	19%	8%	17%	17%	19%	15%
TAKS Cumulative Met Standard (First and Second Administration)											
2006	94%	98%	93%	91%	*	88%	>99%	86%	97%	92%	86%
2005	93%	98%	94%	92%	*	92%	>99%	91%	93%	89%	96%
TAKS Failers Promoted by Grade Placement Committee											
2005	49.0%	62.5 %	33.3%	20.0%	*	*	*	*	*	20.0 %	*
2004	48.2%	50.0 %	28.6%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Promoted to Grade 4											
2006	38%	59%	25%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2005	56%	13%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Retained in Grade 3											
2006	86%	55%	>99%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2005	76%	88%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

For Campus B third grade reading, the percentage of students who failed TAKS but were promoted by the grade placement committee meeting was not statistically significant in 2004 and 20% of students in 2005. In this example the campus percentage is lower than the state averages of 48.2% in 2004 and 49.0% in 2005. The percentages of students requiring accelerated instruction in 2005 were 18% and 14% in 2006.

In 2006 91% of the fifth grade students on Campus B passed the reading TAKS test. In 2005 81% of the students on Campus B passed the fifth grade reading TAKS test. Table 4.7 outlines the school report card data for the grade 5 reading TAKS test on Campus B.

Table 4.7

School Report Card Data: Campus B, Grade 5 Reading (English and Spanish) Student Success Initiative Data

Year	State	Dist.	Campus Group	Campus	Af. Amer	Hisp.	White	Male	Fem.	Econ Dis.	LEP
Students Requiring Accelerated Instruction											
2006	20%	10%	25%	19%	*	16%	9%	21%	17%	21%	16%
2005	25%	13%	28%	23%	29%	32%	8%	17%	30%	39%	50%
TAKS Cumulative Met Standard (First and Second Administration)											
2006	89%	96%	87%	91%	*	92%	91%	86%	96%	90%	89%
2005	86%	94%	86%	81%	71%	77%	92%	83%	80%	70%	58%
TAKS Failers Promoted by Grade Placement Committee											
2005	69.9%	84.0 %	66.7%	71.4%	*	83.8 %	*	80.0 %	*	83.3 %	80.0 %
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Retained in Grade 5											
2006	68%	62%	80%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

For Campus B grade 5 reading, the percentage of students receiving accelerated instruction was 23% in 2005 and 19% in 2006. These percentages are close to the state average of 25% in 2005 and 20% in 2006. Campus B had a percentage of TAKS failers promoted by the grade placement committee that was comparable with the state at 71.4% for the campus and 69.9% for the state.

In 2006 94% of the students on Campus B passed the TAKS mathematics test for grade 5. In 2005 91% of the fifth grade students passed the TAKS mathematics test on

Campus B. The following table, Table 4.8, outlines the school report card data for grade 5 mathematics for Campus B.

Table 4.8

School Report Card Data: Campus B, Grade 5 Mathematics (English and Spanish)

Student Success Initiative Data

Year	State	Dist.	Campus Group	Campus	Af. Amer	Hisp.	White	Male	Fem.	Econ Dis.	LEP
Students Requiring Accelerated Instruction											
2006	19%	9%	22%	28%	*	31%	18%	30%	25%	32%	32%
2005	21%	11%	21%	36%	57%	42%	17%	24%	50%	44%	62%
TAKS Cumulative Met Standard (First and Second Administration)											
2006	90%	95%	88%	94%	*	92%	>99%	93%	96%	93%	90%
2005	88%	95%	89%	91%	71%	92%	>99%	92%	90%	88%	92%
TAKS Failers Promoted by Grade Placement Committee											
2005	69.6%	79.7%	65.0%	83.3%	*	80.0%	*	80.0%	*	80.0%	*
TAKS Met Standard (Failed in Previous Year) Retained in Grade 5											
2006	66%	75%	73%	55%	*	55%	*	57%	53%	52%	55%

Campus B had 36% in 2005 and 28% in 2006 of students who received accelerated instruction. This was somewhat higher than the state average of 21% in 2005 and 19% in 2006. However, Campus B had a much higher percentage of students who were promoted by a grade placement committee after not meeting passing standards on the TAKS test at 83.3% in 2005 as compared to the state average at 69.6% in 2005.

The state overall has high percentages of third and fifth graders who are promoting students when they do not meet passing requirements for TAKS. According to the data above the highest percentages of students who are promoted even after not passing the TAKS test are in fifth grade mathematics and reading on Campus A and B and in grade three reading on Campus A.

Participants

In order to further understand the context of this research, descriptive statistics were employed to detail information about the research participants themselves. The research participants' identities remain confidential, however, it is important to examine their backgrounds and their demographic information for comparative purposes.

The research participants as stakeholders included the following: teachers, parents, campus-level administrators, and district personnel. In total, fourteen interviews were conducted. Six interviews were conducted with teachers from the two campuses. A total of five parents were interviewed from the two campuses. One district level administrator and two campus level administrators also participated. Because the subject matter of this research is of a somewhat personal nature, particularly for parents, the research participants were ensured that their identities would be kept confidential. The goal of keeping the participants' identities confidential was encouragement to provide as much honest information as possible without fear of retribution for their employment or for their children. In order to categorize the research participants, they were each assigned a letter corresponding to the first letter of their stakeholder role and a number. Teachers were assigned the values T1-T6, parents were assigned the values P1-P5, and administrators, including both district and campus, were assigned the values A1-A3. The background and demographic information for the research participants outlined in order include teachers, parents, and administrators.

Teachers

Six teachers were interviewed as a part of this research. The six teachers possessed varying levels of experience, but were specifically sought because either they previously taught or currently instruct third or fifth grade students.

Table 4.9

Backgrounds Information for Teachers

Research Participant	Current Grade Level Taught	Years of Experience	Previous experience as a 3 rd or 5 th grade teacher during SSI?	Experience as a grade placement committee member?
T1	All grade levels	5+	Yes	Yes
T2	3 rd	10+	Yes	Yes
T3	5 th	20+	Yes	Yes
T4	All grade levels	20+	Yes	Yes
T5	5 th	1	Yes	Yes
T6	3 rd	1	Yes	Yes

The teachers were varied in their years of experience in education, which provided a varied sample of perceptions and opinions. Fortunately, all of the teachers had previous experience as either a third or fifth grade teacher or experience in both levels over the course of their careers during the implementation of the Student Success Initiative. Because all of the teachers had experience as members of the grade placement committee, their knowledge base on this particular research topic was vast.

Table 4.10

Demographic Information for Teachers

Research Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Gender
T1	30s	Hispanic	Female
T2	30s	Hispanic	Female
T3	50s	Hispanic	Female
T4	50s	Hispanic	Female
T5	40s	White	Female
T6	30s	Hispanic	Female

The teachers' ages ranged from early thirties to late fifties. Because the two campuses examined in this study are bilingual campuses and therefore the majority of the faculty members are Hispanic, the majority of the teachers themselves interviewed were Hispanic. Five out of six of the teachers interviewed were Hispanic and all were female, as elementary campuses tend to have faculties that are primarily female.

Parents

Five parents were interviewed as a portion of this research. The five parents had varying levels of experience with retention or social promotion with their children.

Table 4.11

Background Information for Parents

Research Participant	Currently or previously have had a child retained or socially promoted?	Currently or previously have a child in 3 rd or 5 th grade subject to SSI?	Experience as a grade placement committee member?
P1	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2	Yes	Yes	No
P3	Yes	Yes	Yes
P4	No	Yes	Yes
P5	No	Yes	Yes

The parents who were interviewed for this study all had experience with the Student Success Initiative in that they previously or currently had a child in third or fifth grade subject to the SSI. Four out of the five parents had experiences as grade placement committee members. Three of the parents interviewed had experience with their child being retained or socially promoted. The backgrounds and experiences of the parents are a valuable contribution to the examination of the perceptions surrounding the SSI.

Table 4.12

Demographics Information for Parents

Research Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Gender
P1	50s	Hispanic	Male
P2	30s	Hispanic	Female
P3	30s	Hispanic	Female
P4	40s	Hispanic	Female
P5	30s	Hispanic	Female

The majority of the parents interviewed were females in their early thirties or forties. There was one male parent interviewed. All of the parents who participated in the interview were Hispanic. Once again, the majority of the parents on the two campuses in the study are Hispanics; therefore the parents who participated in the study were Hispanic.

Administrators

Three administrators were interviewed in this research. The three administrators were either principals or worked in a central office capacity at the district level.

Table 4.13

Background Information for Administrators

Research Participants	Years of Experience	Experience as a grade placement committee member?	Years in the school district used in this study
A1	10+	Yes	3
A2	5+	Yes	5+
A3	10+	Yes	5+

The administrators who participated in the study have all had experiences in their roles as a grade placement committee member. All of the administrators had less than five years of experience in the school district used in the study. The administrators had five to ten years of experience as Principals, as Assistant Principals or as Central Office personnel.

Table 4.14

Demographic Information for Administrators

Research Participants	Age	Ethnicity	Gender
A1	50s	Hispanic	Female
A2	50s	Hispanic	Female
A3	40s	Hispanic	Female

All of the administrators who participated in the study were Hispanic females. Their ages ranged from early forties to late fifties.

The research participants had varying backgrounds and demographic information. It is of importance to note that the majority of the participants were Hispanic. All but one of the research participants were female.

Table 4.15

Comparison of Research Participants' Backgrounds and Demographic Information

(N=14)

Experience as a grade placement committee member?	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Yes=13	Hispanic=13	30s=6	Male=1
No=1	White=1	40s=3	Female=13
		50s=5	

Although the demographics of the research participants may not be ethnically diverse as the majority of them are Hispanic, this population is important to interview because the students with whom they work or who are their children are the students most affected by retention and by social promotion. The majority of the research participants were female. Fortunately, all but one of the research participants had experience as a grade placement committee member and this made for a valuable contribution regarding their perceptions as a member of that decision-making body.

Interview Data

Stakeholder Experiences with Social Promotion or Retention Policies

When the research participants were asked about their experiences with social promotion and with retention policies, one could conclude that they had varying levels of experience. Some participants spoke at length about their experiences while others were not as vocal. The campus level personnel tended to be more vocal about their experiences, which could be attributed to the fact that their higher, more consistent level

of access to the information, they were more comfortable speaking about their experiences.

Teacher Experiences

The teachers who participated in the interviews were willing to speak at length regarding their previous experiences with social promotion or with retention policies, usually based upon their previous year of teaching or roles that they might previously have had in making social promotion and retention decisions. Here are the responses of several participants:

Oh. My experience has been, basically on both levels I've had to actually pass students or promote students in such a way that they are placed not so much promoted, based on my opinion and records of experience I have had to retain children, because of the current standards.

It is my understanding that it supposed to be something that's going to be beneficial and something that going to be so the child is not falling further and further behind so the child has time to catch up to the to other students

I've had through the years, I've had several children who were retained because of TAKS and so I've watched them as they've gone through the process the second go round in third grade and so far I haven't noticed any negative effects of the students that I've had who've been retained.

This has been the first the year that I have encountered one child that has been retained. And it was because I was new to this grade level last year. Second grade, I didn't have any, of course. This year I had one. And it was because he was retained last year because of TAKS.

Well, I think, our kids, they are bigger kids and more mature kids, I think social promotion is necessary because if not they are already, like, they already, how can I put this. They are already having a hard time and they're really big or really mature, I think they need to be moved on. I think retention should be done anywhere from kindergarten to second or third grade because after that would just, I think, its just not any good for the kids.

Through our committees because of our new law or the law that's in effect right now where students have to be retained if they don't pass certain tests.

My experiences have been that we meet as a team to review the scores of the students and those that qualify under retention or promotion. We meet as a team and so I'm an active participant in that. And I do have an active voice and an opinion in those decisions.

The teachers were eager to share their previous experiences with social promotion and with retention policies. The teachers who were interviewed often interjected their personal opinions when answering the research questions. In general, the teachers who were interviewed were eager to share their personal opinions and views regarding critical educational issues such as social promotion, retention, high-stakes testing and the accountability system.

Parental Experiences

The parental perceptions and account of experiences varied from the teachers' experiences as reflected in the data. The following statements are parental experiences surrounding social promotion and retention.

Ok, well I don't know if they told you that A. got held back. And they said that they, there were a lot of focuses there. And she told me, as far they don't really do a lot of learning there. So they said if she like didn't do good on the TAKS test. She took them, I don't know how many times they try to get them to take them. The teacher said she did really well in school and things like that. And she's still not doing good this year. Yeah, I don't think she's struggling. No, I think it's more she's just not focusing. She's just not putting her full that if she really applied herself, she'd be really smart and she'd be able to do it. We're like always on her about that.

Well I'm not too happy about retention because I had 2 boys held back. One of them lost all of his motivation at school, he don't feel like he can do it no more, he lost, "Why try? Last year I tried and they still held me back."

And so I think in my experience, it's been minimal, because I do feel like it does hold a certain. I don't know like, it stagnates their progress in a way. Where they just feel like self-conscious because they didn't go on or whatever. But I think sometimes in some cases, it's necessary. But most of the time I think just with one-on-one help.

The parental experiences surrounding social promotion and retention relied largely on their personal experiences with their own children's retention, according to the data. Overall the data showed parental experiences were not interpreted to be positive. Several of the parents' comments led the researcher to believe that they felt more could have been done by the schools to help their children.

Administrative Experiences

The administrators who were interviewed had much experience with social promotion and retention policies, as it is a critical portion of the responsibility in their position. The administrators provided truly candid responses and were seemingly adamant in expressing their honest views regarding social promotion and retention policies. Here are the responses of several administrators:

My experiences have been that social promotion does not work. It lowers the self- concept of the student. It actually increases their probability to be retained again because they're usually put in the bottom half of their class because of their instruction levels. And thinking that it's going to help them because they're a lower level they will be able to feel that they can participate with the class. And actually, research says that it doesn't do that. It just lowers their self-concept. And they never go beyond the grade level.

Well, my experiences have been that the kids who weren't able to, hadn't met the expectations of that grade level, they were retained. And I certainly didn't agree with that because a lot of the times the kids weren't provided with all their different interventions that they needed in order to meet those expectations. So, they were really just looking at kids rather than looking at the instruction that they had been receiving.

Given the influential nature of the administrators' positions, it was refreshing to listen to their candid perceptions. Surprisingly, within their own stakeholder group, the data showed that the administrators had similar experiences with social promotion and with retention. The stakeholder experiences with social promotion and retention drove their

understandings of the SSI, which are addressed in the results of the first research question.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Promotion and Retention

The research participants had varying views about the advantages and disadvantages of social promotion and of retention policies. Often their previous or personal experience with retention provided advantages or disadvantages with which to connect with their experience. Because some of the advantages or disadvantages mentioned in the interview data were consistent across the three types of research participants, their perceptions are presented together. When asked about the advantages of social promotion or retention policies the participants stated,

The advantage is if the child is not ready but well, social promotion the advantages (disadvantages) are twice as bad, giving them that constant encouragement, the continued belief that you believe in them even though they may have struggled, so the belief in them that they can do it, so esteem is not lost. (stated by a teacher)

I think the advantages are children who are immature and need that extra year to get kind of caught up. They have benefited negative effects. There have been a couple of students that I have recommended that they not be retained because of social issues because they were much older to begin with, because they had already been retained once, or their birthday came at a time of year that they would have been considerably older than most of their peers in that grade level. And I felt like it wasn't in their best interests to be held back. (stated by a teacher)

There, I can think of maybe one advantage. But it, you would have to look at the total child. You would have to look at everything in the environment. Because some children, it's not that they can't learn, that they don't want to succeed. It's just that sometimes it, it comes with other kind of social, environmental, cultural factors that effect them. I mean, they may have been given all the interventions, reading recovery, literacy groups, extra help, tutoring. But sometimes it's within the child, too, for them to make up their mind that "Hey, if I don't do what's expected of me in this grade level, I'm not going to pass." And the children faced with the reality that they didn't pass. That they were retained then somewhere along they wake up and you know, "Oh yeah, this is for real, I can be retained." And then you see within that year, that yeah they do

succeed. It was maybe that one factor that was keeping them from succeeding in that, grade level. (stated by an administrator)

For a kid that's developmentally behind I think its wonderful because it really lets the kids mature, and I've had two kids that we've retained and its been wonderful and they are in middle school and they're making B's and actually succeeding. And I think for certain kids its necessary, especially when they are not at level, but for kids that weren't at level in kindergarten and were passed on first, were passed on, I think they're too far behind and I don't know that retaining them every year would actually help them out, because they have too big of a gap. (stated by a teacher)

The advantage of retention is the fact that for my experience I've noticed that the students that do stay behind have improved, I do see growth, progress. I also feel that it would have helped. (stated by a teacher)

I think the advantage of retention is that it helps the students to be more prepared for the expectations that are required and to reduce anxiety and feeling of success. I feel like a lot of students lack the maturity whether its academic maturity or social maturity, so retention is a good thing, I've seen it as a good thing, to have a student retained, to achieve success. (stated by a teacher)

The research participants did have some experiences by which they were able to find advantages of retention. Some of the participants did note a concern about giving students a "complex" or perhaps causing low self-esteem by retaining them, which reflects their awareness of research regarding retention that focuses on the psychological aspects of retention. Other participants mentioned outside factors playing a part in the education of a student from a holistic point of view citing cultural issues, social issues, environmental factors, age, and even physical size or maturity.

Several of the research participants mentioned their perceived disadvantages of retention. As reflected in the data, in expressing their views, the research participants mentioned a student's physical size as being a concern, their emotional detriment or any psychological harm, and also the level of development in a child's maturity as being

reasons retention served as an advantage or a disadvantage. Regarding the disadvantages of retention, several research participants stated the following:

Well the disadvantage, it can backfire easily in the sense that you are walking a very fine line in promoting a student who may not be academically ready. You want the self-esteem and all is important but its just as important for them to master the subject matter because once they are in that higher grade and they are not well prepared, they are going to struggle, they are going to lose that self-esteem that you worked so hard for. Personal experience, I had a little girl who was retained due to current state standards and also a request from her own mother, and although I wasn't thrilled with that idea, a year afterwards, the following year the little girl's self-esteem was really boosted, that she came to me and said "You know what? I didn't like it at first, but I'm glad that my mom insisted that I be held back. It was a fifth grader. She felt bad, but this new fifth grade year was a lot smoother for her. So she because of her own maturity level saw the benefits on being retained. On the flip side of that, I've seen those who have been promoted and probably shouldn't have and so there's both sides, there's a very fine line, you have to make sure that you have support for your actions. (stated by a teacher)

Again in the response from the research participant above, the teacher mentions both self-esteem and maturity in the assessment of whether or not retention was an advantage or disadvantage. Another teacher stated:

I would have to say that one of the major disadvantages, at least in my experience is that they wait too long to retain. I think that if it had been done sometimes in some of the cases for these children, it had been done maybe right away, kinder, first grade. They would not have so many problems that they do later. I did try last year to retain a student. And it was completely shot down because they said that let the next year, being the TAKS grade be the determiner. (stated by a teacher)

This comment was especially significant in that the teacher was expressing some of the outside factors that demand consideration when school personnel are making retention decisions. This could be attributed to unknown norms that the school personnel as stakeholders are expected to follow. This notion is discussed in depth in the explanation of emergent themes. The fact that the teacher said the committee that she met with would

not allow her to retain a student because the following school year the student would be in a TAKS grade level is an important example of the perceived unwritten discussions and guidelines that may influence promotion or retention decisions. When speaking personally about the disadvantages observed from their children's experiences with retention several of the parents stated:

Well there was no advantages for seeing my kids, I don't think it was right because they tried and tried and one of my boys, N., he got held back and it didn't do him too good, because he's in the middle school and he does good because I got him help over there, and that's what I was going to do with my boy N., and they held him back, I already had things set up over there for him. N. gets tutored. And I already had the same help for my son, my other, for R. too, I already had things set up for him and he got held back. (stated by a parent)

I don't know how many advantages there really are. I think it's something that has less advantages. (stated by a parent)

I think the disadvantage is I think they're physical. And I also think they're also psychological. Because the physical part is you know, the child is mature. He's going to be a foot bigger than the rest of the kids. I think they're already feeling wow, I'm bigger and whatever. Not only that, but the younger kids too, for instance if he's a bully or if he's aggressive and he's going to be in that classroom with smaller kids. I think that's a disadvantage physically. And of course emotionally just knowing that you didn't go on with your friends. I mean I think that can affect some kids. (stated by a parent)

The only thing [disadvantage] I can think is they promote someone who is not ready for it. You know, that is a disadvantage right there, you know? It doesn't help the child at all. And that's the reason I did hold her back when they said that to me. That you know, she might struggle. It would be worse for her so I said that's fine. That she could held back. But even though I know that wasn't the reason. I just know that, like I said, she doesn't apply herself. And so, I guess I gave it a chance to see what would happen. For her to be retained next year. (stated by a parent)

This significant comment made by a parent hints at an assumption that there is an unknown, underlying reason that she received encouraged to retain her daughter, although the reason she was presented was to help her child avoid struggling

academically. This data suggests that perhaps there is an underlying agenda in the decision-making processes surrounding social promotion and retention. This theme of unwritten or underlying agendas is explored later in the emergent themes.

The administrators' perceptions regarding the disadvantages or advantages of retention were similar to the teachers' and parents' perceptions within the data. In all cases, the data showed many more disadvantages than advantages in the participants' responses. The administrators stated:

I think there's more disadvantages than advantages. I think that, you know, as a school system we need to be able to provide a lot of different types of interventions. And not keep a child back a whole year. If as a system we could change the way we see how students go from one grade level to the next grade level then to the next grade level. Then you know, it's our responsibility to catch up that student and close those gaps. Because it does a lot of damage to the kid's self esteem, I think. A majority of the time, and the research says, that the majority of the time those students wind up dropping out of school. The only pros I see about retaining a student or keeping them back is when that student is very young, very immature and really only at the lower levels like kindergarten, maybe not even first grade. Other than that, I think that as a system we need to provide ways into where we can help that student. Make sure that he's going to be able to go to the next grade level and be successful. And if it's not at the next grade level, then what are we going to do to catch him up. (stated by an administrator)

Ok, I guess the disadvantages of social promotion and retention is that it doesn't make them better readers because they never go beyond their level they're expected to go. That teachers sometimes have the lower expectations of students that have been retained because of the perception that these children already come with the conception that they can't learn, that they have disabilities, so sometimes teachers themselves make excuses and lower the expectations for these students. (stated by an administrator).

The comment above illustrates the perspective of some administrators regarding low expectations. According to this response by the research participant, teachers may have lower expectations of students who are retained, setting them up for failure from the onset.

Although the participants diplomatically cited both advantages and disadvantages, many more disadvantages were expressed during the interviews. Often the participants expressed their views on social promotion or on retention based upon previous personal experiences either with their students or with their own children. The data showed that the participants ultimately saw retention and sometimes even social promotion as being ineffective for students.

Research Question One: Stakeholder Understandings Regarding Social Promotion

Law and Application at the Local Level

The various stakeholders had varying levels of comprehension and knowledge regarding social promotion law and its application at the local level. The levels of understanding amongst the stakeholders were often related to their prior experiences with the SSI as teachers, parents or administrators. The varying levels of cognizance could be attributed to the fact that the school level personnel have more immediate access to information regarding social promotion law and policies. One teacher stated that her understanding of the SSI was, “That everything in our power has to be done to help students be successful no matter what we perceive their capabilities to be that every child is capable of being successful and every effort should be made to help that child succeed in spite of their circumstances.” Some of the research participants stressed the importance of focus on accountability as attributed to the SSI. Two administrators stated:

My understanding is that is that if that child takes the TAKS test and the child doesn't pass for the second time in third grade. They have the opportunity to take it a third time during the summer. And if they don't pass, then they are retained in that grade level. Which that, you know, I guess I feel that after, after that three time they're not being successful, you know they need some kind of intervention. You know, whether it, whether it's interventions that are they're going to happen that year with within that grade that level. Or that they're going to be placed with

an improvement plan. I mean it depends but as long as every intervention has been given to that particular child.

Well, my understanding is that if the student don't pass the TAKS after the three times they are given that opportunity to take that test. It's that they are retained. But there has to be a committee to make that decision. The principals, the parents, teachers and so forth. The committee decides whether that child's going to stay or if they're going to be able to pass them on. And also, ultimately that parent has the ultimate decision to make. You know, am I going to want to pass my child on and take that responsibility. But I'm thinking that everyone in that committee has the responsibility that if they pass that child on, they need to make sure that he's going to be successful.

Naturally, the administrators and teachers consistently had the most depth in understanding the social promotion legislation, which this could be attributed to their access to information and the application of this information as an element of their work.

When asked about her understanding of the SSI, two teachers stated:

If they don't pass the TAKS test in third, then they have three opportunities to pass the test. If they don't then there's a committee that meets to determine if that child progressed in the three opportunities of taking the test, and if he did progress then we can decide as a committee, if, with mandatory summer school, obviously he attended he attended or the child attended, if the child continued to have success then would be promoted to fourth grade with a plan, I believe there's an improvement plan. Or if the child did not progress, that the child will remain in third, in the grade level, but the parent, there's also a parent involvement, where the parent can automatically deny the child taking the test again after the first or second, and that means automatic retention.

Well I understood that they had to pass the test and I didn't know that the students actually could be moved on. So, at another district I worked at it was just students would not move on and then when I moved to this district I found out that you can actually pass students on. I mean it was, in another district, it was a big deal, no the kid is not moving on they are staying and so I guess I didn't have a very good understanding because I thought that's the student would stay in the grade if they did not pass the test.

The data showed the research participants who work in the schools themselves to have a more intricate conception of the Student Success Initiative. This could be attributed to the fact that they are the stakeholders with more access to information regarding the

guidelines of the SSI, and also the documentation and the manuals by whose guidelines the grade placement committees are held.

When speaking about her understanding about the SSI, one parent stated, “The only thing I know is pretty much, if they don’t pass it, they don’t pass the grade level.”

Another parent stated the following regarding their understanding of the SSI:

Well I’m not too crazy about it because like I say, my boys they all tried, I’m not just talking about my boys, I’ve seen their friends, they come to my house and they talk about it, like I say its this law that they have to pass, and they’re not too happy about it. There are some other people I know that have more problems and I can see and I can understand that they probably don’t try, and when I see somebody else that tries and they get held back, its not good at all. Because they lose interest, they don’t even want to come back to school. And they say well we tried and tried.

Another parent who has also worked in the school system stated the following,

I mean I just understand that they have to pass the test. Or then you’re going to have the committee to see whether they go on or not. And I do understand that they have several chances to take the test. Not just one. They have three in third.

According to the data, the interviewed parents seemed to focus only on the high-stakes assessment issue when explaining their understanding of the SSI. This stressed the perceived level of import of passing the TAKS test for many of the research participants. The focus of these particular stakeholders was on whether or not their children were promoted or were retained, based upon their perceived importance of the TAKS test.

Research Question Two: Decision-Making Mechanisms for Implementing Social Promotion Policies

What decision-making mechanisms exist to implement social promotion policies? The primary decision-making mechanisms that exist to implement the social promotion policies are the guidelines of the grade placement committee (GPC).

In accordance with the Texas Education Code §28.0211, decisions by the GPC shall be made on an individual student basis to ensure the most effective way to support the student's academic achievement on grade level. The GPC shall be composed of the following members: the principal or principal's designee, the student's parent or guardian, the student's teacher(s) of the subject of the grade advancement test(s) on which the student has failed to demonstrate proficiency. If a parent, guardian, or designee is unable to attend a meeting, the district may use other methods to ensure parent participation, including individual and conference telephone calls. The district may designate an individual to act on behalf of the student in place of a parent, guardian, or designee if no such person can be located. A surrogate parent named to act on behalf of a student with a disability shall be considered a parent for purposes of TEC §28.0211. If the teacher is unavailable, the principal shall designate a certified professional educator who is most familiar with the student in the subject area to serve on the GPC. (Texas Education Agency, 2007).

The grade placement committee consists of all the stakeholders involved in the life of the student whose grade placement is being considered, due to not meeting the passing criteria on the TAKS test in the third or the fifth grades. The grade placement committee entrusts the stakeholders with the power or trust to render appropriate educational decisions for students at the local level, assuming that they, as the experts, are better equipped to make final promotion or retention decision for an individual student.

According to the Texas Education Agency's Grade Placement Committee Manual for 2007, the following is stated in letters sent to parents informing them of their child's performance on the TAKS test:

Under Texas law, as set forth in the SSI grade advancement requirements, your child **must** meet the passing standard on this test in order to be promoted to Grade 4 or 5. Please note that these grade advancement requirements provide a system of support for student academic achievement. This system includes: Three testing opportunities, Additional instruction in the subject area for which the student did not meet the passing standard after each test administration, A Grade Placement Committee, consisting of the principal, teacher, and parent or guardian, that decides on an individual student basis the most effective way to support a student's academic achievement, Accelerated instruction plans for the next year for every student who does not meet the passing standard on the required grade advancement assessments after three opportunities (Texas Education Agency,

2007).

Collectively, the research participants seemed to have a firm first-hand grasp of the decision-making processes surrounding social promotion policies. The research participants discuss their involvement and their perceptions of this decision-making mechanism based upon their observations of each other's roles. When asked about their observations about the parent's role in the grade placement committee the research participants stated,

Not in my experience, its been more (teacher and administrator dynamic) and they will listen and smile but its almost as if there's a fear of really get involved and possibly and rightfully so, if the don't know the child they are having to go on what data is provided but its really another administrator who can come up with the questions, well did you try this strategy or that strategy or be able to ask you questions as far as well how. What does the data look like as far as the assessments, if for example we're looking for a child that say they've taken the test for the third time and they have never been retained before, and I'm going to go argue and say "Hey look, look at my grades, look at the practice tests", this is, I don't know what happened and I can't say for sure, but this is not a good gauge, I do not recommend retaining this child, I would say, let's place them with a plan and see how they do in the following year, whereas you might have a principal who comes up and says but you know we're still looking, I've got a really, we have to be sure because we uh, we're passing a child who technically has already failed all three, three opportunities, and uh, that parent they're not going to know what we're talking about. They're not going to. (stated by a teacher)

The parents that I dealt with have been very involved and they've been very supportive and prior to getting to the grade placement committee meeting we've already made our decision, its not a surprise. (stated by a teacher)

This particular response was significant in its representation of an understanding that teachers may have with the various other stakeholders for a predicted outcome prior to the actual decision-making committee meeting. Another teacher made a similar comment about making decisions without parents even before the grade placement committee meetings regarding promotion and retention of students. The teacher stated, "If the

parents had a little more say so. I think it would be different. I think a lot of times as the professionals, we undermine what that parents, you know. It's bad." The teacher was expressing their perception that the other school personnel as stakeholders may have the ultimate decision-making authority in the grade placement committee meetings. The data showed that teachers had perceptions about parents not having as active a role in the decision-making body as those of other committee members. One teacher stated,

I think that they should be allowed to have more input. I think that, I don't know that if it's just here or if it's at other campuses also. But I think the parent's don't feel, especially the bilingual parents, I don't think that they feel like they have the right to come in. And like, that they don't have the rights. I think that they're just use to the teacher. You know. I tell the kids all the time that if you don't agree with me, that's ok. I'm not going to get mad at you. You didn't like this book, you write you didn't like it and this is right. Getting them out of that mindset that their parent's have, oh what the teacher says go. That's so important. And this generation will be, maybe the first generation because they come to school in the United States. And they have had the opportunity to say that this is, I can say whatever I want and it's ok.

Research participants also frequently alluded to their perception that the parents of students, especially those of bilingual students, were reluctant or intimidated to come to the schools in advocacy of their children.

Research Question Three: Teacher Concerns When Applying the Law

The teachers expressed various concerns regarding the local level application of the SSI. Among these concerns was a preoccupation with the students' self-concept in a retention or in a social promotion situation. The teachers also overwhelmingly expressed in the data a concern for the level of tension and of anxiety observed from the students in the context of high-stakes testing.

Often the research participants made commentary about students' maturity level, their physical size, and their development as a major concern when applying the SSI law.

Several participants stated:

I don't like retaining, I mean, like, that is, like the last alternative and I have seen and I know of other teachers who are big believers on retention just based on maturity level and I believe that child's going to mature over the summer. There are things that are going to happen and they're like no, no ,no, retain, retain, retain and it could be a child who's passed the TAKS test but they don't feel like they are mature enough and get the grades and a lot of times it comes down to a simple thing as personality conflict between teacher and student and a teacher will go for wanting the jugular and if its not for a strong administrator who says you are not providing me enough proof to retain then they will pass.

(stated by an administrator)

I guess it depends on the child, it depends on the child, some children are not developmentally ready to be in third grade the first go round and the second go round; they just bloom and other kids it would harm them to hold them back, its been my experience that the ones that have been held back, they have done well, its been a good decision. (stated by a teacher)

I can understand promotion with an improvement plan, but I think overall it just involves maturity and time and obviously a retention, they will be better prepared, obviously but at the same time we don't want them to fall too behind.

(stated by a teacher)

I feel sad because I think that sometimes we as teachers know that these students are behind and they need to stay one more year, but we don't do it because we're scared that we're going to hurt them, you know, give them some kind of complex.

(stated by a teacher)

Within the data the research participants often mentioned affecting a student's self-concept or their self-esteem. Participants when making retention decisions often made comments of concern regarding the students' maturity, possible harm, and development. The data showed that comments were often made about the stress, the anxiety or the tension that the participants observed in their students or in their children regarding the TAKS test. A parent stated:

And I think, you know, that if they don't put so much pressure on it [the TAKS test], she wouldn't be so worried about it. But they, you know, and she could have told me. She told me about it, she'll tell me all kinds of things. "I'm not suppose to eat this, I'm not suppose to do that, I'm suppose to get lots of sleep and na, na, na, and this and that." I'm like, "What are you talking about?", she's like, "Yeah because we have our TAKS test coming in fourteen days". She knows exactly how many days. And I think it's too much pressure on them. It makes her nervous and she has anxiety.

It became apparent from the data that several participants believed that the students were under a tremendous amount of pressure because of the TAKS testing. Another teacher expressed concern not only over the state testing but also the district-mandated testing and how overwhelmed the students feel. The teacher stated:

You know they are gearing for fun and vacation and down to the wire the day they are supposed to be having their party. They are being tested, so in response you know, in talking to other teachers they are saying, "I don't know what happened, they all bombed, yeah they all bombed." You have to be in a certain state of mind and you cannot all of a sudden say, "Oh, we have to do a district math, science, reading test all before or on the last week of school." It just can't be done, and the kids know, its not the test so they're just going to get through it whichever way they can. Strategies go out the window. They will answer just to answer to get it done, they don't want to sit five hours testing.

This teacher was seemingly concerned about the numerous assessments with which the students are faced. A parent also expressed a thought that their own child shared with them regarding the test and its perceived importance. When speaking about the emphasis that their child perceived the TAKS test to have the parent stated,

As long as you pass that test. If I pass that I'm gone. Like a ten year old, it makes you wonder if they think that's the most important thing, the test and that's it. I don't have to do good all year long as long as I pass the test.

The research participants often made comments regarding their conceptions of the TAKS test in a high-stakes context, and also how often a student's maturity, their physical size or their developmental level was factored into retention decisions. Clearly, the various

stakeholders labored over their retention and their promotion decisions and seemed to take the responsibility of an esteemed burden with such long-range implications for the students' lives.

Research Question Four: Outcomes of the Implementation of Social Promotion Policy at the Local Level

As reflected in the data, the research participants had mixed views regarding the effects of the SSI. However, in general there was a distinct sense that the various stakeholders did not deem the SSI to be effective. The stakeholders' views range from the perception that the SSI puts students at risk of failure, actually causing students to be promoted more often to the opinion that the SSI does hold both the teacher and the parents more accountable for student success.

Regarding the perceived ineffectiveness of the SSI, one teacher stated, "You're putting more students at risk of failure." The participants had similar views regarding whether or not, in their experience or perception, students were more likely to be promoted or to be retained in the context of the grade placement committee meeting decisions. When asked which was more likely, retention or promotion, one teacher stated that students were, "more likely to be promoted." Another teacher stated that she felt students were "passed on more often." When asked which was more likely after a grade placement committee meeting, promotion or retention of a student, one teacher stated that students were more likely to be, "promoted, I think." Another novice teacher observed that she felt students were "promoted more often." Several participants echoed this assessment about students' much more common promotion and stated:

I think they are promoted most often. And again it goes back to parent pressure, it goes back to even sometimes the teacher feels that they should not be allowed to go. But because they are already eleven and they're going to be twelve or thirteen in the fifth grade. Sometimes they feel like "No, it's not going to be a good thing to this child to stay behind because it's going to be really, really, you know behind. And it's going to harm him more than to have him be passed on. (stated by an administrator)

I'm thinking my experience has been that they've been promoted more often than not. You know there has been some cases. And I've been really disappointed to hear that they retain. Especially with the fifth grade students. I mean, any student. Third of fifth, but especially with the fifth grade student. When they see that all their friends are going into middle school. And they are here because they didn't pass the TAKS. But their report cards say that they were doing ok. So I just, you know, it's not a good feeling to see that. (stated by an administrator)

Some of the participants felt that there were positive outcomes in the implementation of the SSI. Several participants stated:

The effect of the Student Success Initiative is that teachers are held accountable to make sure that they have those interventions in place. The teacher is held accountable to make sure that they have a lesson plan that addresses that child's individual academic needs. And there is paper work that has to be documented. That those interventions were provided for that student. And whether those interventions work or didn't work. And if they didn't work, what other interventions did you try. Now it's, an action plan has to be placed to make sure all those interventions were followed. And even after the second time that they don't they don't pass the test. What's the, what's the alternative? In other words, it's it I like the fact that it doesn't exhaust all the interventions. (stated by an administrator)

What are the effects? I think that its, they are positive because we're trying to target the students that are in need, that are struggling and so we want to meet their needs, and so I think we want student success in that, we don't want students frustrated as they travel through the grade levels. And so I think it's a way of monitoring the students and maintaining the standard of what is expected of the students. (stated by a teacher)

I think that its becoming more effective because the parents are becoming more aware and there's more parents that are seeing what's happening students are even becoming more aware that there are students who are staying behind and so I think the students that are here start becoming a little more serious and I think parents help their children to get a little bit more serious because they know it's a reality and it will happen. (stated by a teacher)

The view expressed by this teacher was not a widely shared philosophy of retention within the construct of the interview data. Overall the data referencing the outcomes or the effects of the SSI were negative. Even when the research participants cited positive elements of the SSI, other aspects of their interviews were, in turn, critical of the policy.

The surveyed parents did not seem to find any positive outcomes from the implementation of the SSI, possibly attributed to the fact their own children's negative experiences with retention. One parent stated:

I ain't seen nothing good come out really. All they are saying now, my boys say well, yeah it's just that one test that we have to pass and if we pass it, we're gone. We ain't going to play no sports. Pass and play you know? I mean my youngest son he saw, like I was telling him. (stated by a parent)

The parent's quote above states the importance expressed by his son of passing the high stakes assessment. A teacher seemed undecided as to whether or not the outcomes of the implementation of the SSI ultimately are positive or negative. Regarding the outcomes, the teacher stated:

It depends on the situation. It depends on the situation and the child. I mean, if they already came to that grade level. Like I had that one little boy, already below, yes. He, I mean that's going to be what does it finally. But he needed to have it done a long time ago. Maybe we wouldn't be in this situation now had he gotten this foundation back in first grade. Like I said, it's been every year that promoted with a grade. You know, promoted with a grade. Promoted with a promotion plan, promoted with a promotion plan every year from pre-k. (stated by a teacher)

Throughout the interviews, the various participants were also asked whether or not they saw retention as an effective tool for student achievement, therefore attributing to the possible outcomes of the SSI. The outcomes of the implementation of the social

promotion law as perceived by stakeholders are that overall the law is ineffective. This conclusion was drawn from the participants' responses on the effectiveness of the SSI.

Presentation of Data Summary

Chapter 4 presented the results from the data collection. The data showed the experiences of the various stakeholders regarding social promotion and retention policies. The stakeholders shared their comprehension of the Student Success Initiative as well as their perceptions as to its effectiveness. The various stakeholders responded with their concerns regarding the application of the social promotion law. Finally, the data demonstrated the stakeholders' opinions on the outcomes of social promotion policy implementation. Chapter 5 presents the data analysis and a discussion of institutional choice, followed by Chapter 6, which provides conclusions and implications for theory, policy and practice.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

Emergent Themes

Throughout the course of the data collection and the coding of transcripts, several broad themes emerge. The three emergent themes in the examination of stakeholder perception regarding social promotion and retention policies are: perceived power, underlying or unwritten agendas, and a call for change due to dissatisfaction with the system. The emergent theme of dissatisfaction with the system itself leads one to believe that the convergence of the state and the local level implementation and the use of the Student Success Initiative (SSI) do not match and therefore rendered ineffective, contradicting their very intent. The perceptions of the research participants regarding the outcomes of the implementation of the SSI match both the state and the local level data regarding the percentages of students who are socially promoted after a grade placement committee meeting. The perceived outcomes of the SSI are supported by the data in that the stakeholders generally believed students to be promoted frequently, even when failing to meet the TAKS test passing standards. Utilizing institutional choice as a framework for examining the educational policy of the SSI, the broad implication drawn from the emergent themes is, first and foremost, one of inherent distrust.

The emergent themes of perceived power, underlying or unwritten agendas and dissatisfaction with the system or a call for change are all themes of distrust within the SSI system. “Institutional choice is an analytic framework for asking better questions about policy” (Clune, 1987, p. 119). The state is considered the actor in this educational policy. The three emergent themes all lent themselves to a distrust of the system as a

whole as Clune posits with institutional choice theory. The stakeholders expressed subtle distrusts of the state mandates in the SSI as a whole with a call for change in the system. The stakeholders also expressed distrust of each other in the grade placement committee context as decision-makers. The stakeholders' distrust also extended to the system and to the decision-makers both at the state and at the local level. The issue of perceived power contributes to the sense of distrust. Other flaws in the decisions made as an aspect of the SSI as an institutional choice include the notion that an underlying or unwritten agenda is at play. Clune finds, "Institutional distrust is a perception that an existing or possible decision-maker lacks the proper substantive values or capacity (e.g., that local schools are insufficiently committed to an academic education)" (Clune, 1987, p. 118). This is precisely the issue surrounding the grade placement committee meetings. The various stakeholders have distrust of either the system as a whole or of the other decision-makers involved in the grade placement committee decisions. This is evident in the administrators' comments on what is best for the children and also with the parental perception of an underlying or a preconceived agenda regarding the promotion or the placement of their child. The state as an actor in educational policy decisions lends itself to distrust from stakeholders at the local level in the creation of the policy, but unlike many state reforms, the SSI provides trust again to the stakeholders at the local level in the decision-making process of the grade placement committee. Clune contends that, "careful comparison requires going beyond distrust. Since no decision-maker is perfect, the distrust directed at one decision-maker must be carefully weighed against the advantages of that decision-maker and both the advantages and disadvantages of alternate decision-makers" (1987, p. 118). The SSI attempts to establish trust at the local level by

giving the stakeholders the capacity to implement the promotion or the retention policy decisions themselves. “In sum, institutional choice is a powerful and falsifiable theory because it predicts decisions, the logic of decisions, and the flaws of decisions” (Clune, 1987, p. 119). The examined flaws of the grade placement committee meetings decisions were explored in the emergent themes.

Perceived Power

The theme of perceived power was one that emerged from the coding of data. The perception of who had the final decision-making power in the grade placement committee meeting was dependent upon the role of the research participant. In general, some parents expressed that the teachers and administrators had the most decision-making authority. The teachers often commented about the parents having the final say in the grade placement committee meetings regarding whether or not the students would be retained. The administrators answered questions of power in more diplomatic ways, contending that the committee collaborated on decisions about retention during the meetings. Regarding themes of power and decision-making authority one teacher stated:

You know I think that most of the power will probably come from the parent and maybe the teacher. The teacher, the grade level teacher whoever had him or her is in the committee, right? I think that’s probably where most power will come from. Well yeah, because you know anything that happens. I think the school districts are so scared of lawsuits and that they try to place them on.

This comment is significant because it alludes to this teacher’s notion that the school districts, perhaps in an effort not to engage in a lawsuit, fear parental litigiousness and therefore appease them by not insisting that students be retained against a parent’s wishes. Another teacher stated:

I think (laughs) I think that, either counselors or administration pretty much has a say so on what's going on and sometimes its parent that has total say so. Sometimes the parent has the total say so? (interviewer asks)

Yes, if they're, if they fight hard enough, they will be the ones to win. Like if the parent speaks loud enough, its going to go the parents way because school and administration have to be careful and thinking of the kids and I don't know... (trails off).

Well I think the administrator has a big role in what happens to the child and the teacher most of the time the administrator actually listens to what goes on in the classroom to decide if they are moving on or not but I think the administrator has more say so than the teacher.

In the opinion of this teacher, the parent has the power if they are vocal and confrontational. This teacher also perceives the school administrator to have the majority of power in the decision-making process for retention decisions. Also regarding the parent's role in the grade placement committee one administrator stated:

That parent coming in doesn't know a lot. So I think there's a lot more training needs to happen for those parents. Especially the bilingual parents. Because the parents come in and they want to do what the school tells them is best for their child. And a lot of our Spanish speaking parents, I should be more specific. The lower SES (socioeconomic status) parents that don't know the system, and are intimidated by the system. They know they're going to ask all those questions and don't always know they have the right to make the ultimate decisions. And even if they do know, they're going to go with what the committees or the committee for their child. I think we just need to educate the parents a lot more. The parents are asked to come to a meeting. And I guess if the parents are educated and they know the system. And they are informed, well you know. That's good. But if those parents come in and they don't know the system. And they don't know, you know, what is going to be. If they're not always just taking the school's word for what they're doing for their child. Then, you know, I think those parents are really at a disadvantage. And then they come to a committee and there's all these people there. And it's intimidating for that parent that's not as educated and doesn't know the system. I think they come in with a disadvantage, you know?

This response from an administrator suggests that the parent is at a disadvantage during the decision-making process due to lack of information or lack of education either

about the process itself or about the method by which retention and promotion decisions are reached. This comment lends itself to power, because if the parent is not empowered to be an active participant in the grade placement committee meeting then clearly they are at a disadvantage and somewhat powerless in the shadow of the teachers and administrators. Another administrator stated:

There, sometimes there's an exception when the parent is very vocal, and very aggressive, and very intentional. To where the parent will not accept the child's failure. And the committee is almost, even though the committee says you know "No, it wouldn't be good to that child's benefit" but the parent is very insistent and sometimes it's not what the grade placement committee says, it's what sometimes the politically correct thing to do. And there's other kind of pressures. There are affluent committee members in the community and you just kind a have to sway and err on the parents' side which is not the best thing to do. I mean if the parent understands both sides and can make a decision that's going to be in the best interest of the child, that's fine. But most of the time the parent's, they are faced with the social stigma. "I don't want the community to see me in a different light because my child was retained." Sometimes it's more of a parent's stigma and a parent consequence then to do what's in the best interest of the child.

This administrator's comment echoes the comment from the teacher concerned that the parent holds the ultimate power in the decision-making committee due to their social status in the community or their affluence. The parental perception of power vacillated from that of the teachers or of the administrators. One parent stated:

But then I think also I don't know how much the power the mom, the mother, has in that decision. Because even say if the principal or the committee says definitely, you know, we're, they're pushing for it. I don't know how much cause the mom has. But I think the committee decides.

Well that's because I think that if it was my son. I don't know how a group would be, you know, to say "Yeah let's just retain him." I think I might just refuse and then what would happen? You know, as a parent my child will go on to fourth grade.

This parent saw the power of the parent in the grade placement committee to be ambiguous, as if they were uncertain how much influence they would have in the final grade placement committee decision. Apparently, the parents do think that they would be able to somewhat influence the committee's decision.

The issue of power was prevalent throughout the interviews. Ironically, the various stakeholders most often saw each other possessing the power, and rarely did they see their own role or their own position as having the final decision-making prowess. Generally, the administrators deemed the parents at a disadvantage in the decision-making process, due to a lack of information. The parents were seemingly unsure about how much power they had and often felt as if the decision was unequivocally made for them. The teachers generally saw themselves as having contributory agency but also mentioned the inherent power in the administrator and in vocal parents. This issue ties in with the issue of underlying or unwritten agendas. The participants of the grade placement committee meetings often had varying perceptions about the power that they had to make decisions regarding student retention and promotion. These perceptions of power led some participants to believe that there was a preconceived agenda that they were not a decision-making contributor in due to their perceived lack of power. Often if the parent felt they did not have power it was because they suspected that the committee had their own agenda of which they were not included.

Underlying/Unwritten Agendas

The theme of underlying or unwritten agendas began to emerge throughout the coding of the transcripts. Though this theme was never explicitly stated, there were subtleties within the transcripts themselves suggesting this theme regarding the grade

placement committee meetings and the involvement of the participants. When the participants were asked about their observations and about the role of the various committee members, the differing perspectives indicated that they often suspected that there was an underlying or written agenda regarding placement decisions for students.

A parent asked about their role in the grade placement committee commented, “They already had it planned. Just come over here and we already got what we want to do and we just want you to hear what is going on.” This comment was represented in different variations throughout the transcript. Again, it was not explicitly stated; however, there was a distinct sense that the parents felt a preconceived agenda and that a decision had already been made without their input. One parent stated:

Well they want to hear your input about what they are thinking about doing but it never seems to go the way if you say I want to do this or that, they already say they’re going to do this first. Well why do they ask what you think if they already know what they’re going to do? That’s what I thought. You already know what you’re doing.

This parent’s statement reveals that they felt their input was not considered with regard to the retention or promotion of their child. It is almost as if they perceived the grade placement committee to be a façade and that their invitation served only as a formality, rather than sitting as a decision-making member of the committee. This theme of underlying agendas lends itself to the theme of power because often the parents did not view themselves as having the power to have significant decision-making authority and therefore did not have an authentic role in the committee’s agenda.

Another parent echoed this sentiment stating:

You see, he [the previous principal] would sit in to these meetings and he would give a lot of output because he knew o.k. these kids and they put a lot out and they [the grade placement committee] would listen to him. I guess that’s everybody’s

boss [the principal] and then you know when he left, everything, just like on my boys, it [the committee] was just closing up, there wasn't very much to say about it. They already knew the way they wanted things. You know [the previous principal] would say let's try this and that. And I would say there you go, now you're talking. She [the teacher] already knows what she wants and she's not going to budge from what she wants.

This parent deemed that the previous administration took the parental perspective into consideration more readily than the current administration and expressed a suspicion of calculated exclusion from the decision-making process.

As stated previously by a teacher:

If the parents had a little more say so I think it would be different. I think a lot of times as the professionals, we undermine the parents, you know.

This candid statement by a teacher reflects the possibility that administrators and teachers already have an agenda when they enter into the grade placement committee meetings with parents. This comment and others suggest the parent is left out of the decision-making process for a variety of reasons. Just as the SSI allows the stakeholders at the local level the finality in grade placement decisions because it assumes they know what is in the best interest of the child, the teachers and administrators assume this of themselves also. As stated by an administrator:

My observation is that the administrator wants to do the best thing for the child. We take everything into consideration. Their short cycle, their benchmarks, their TAKS scores, their Woodcock-Munoz scores, their teacher's opinions. And from there we make the best decision we can. The teacher also, the teacher has had eight plus months with that child. The teacher knows that child, then sometimes even the parent academically. So the administrator and the teacher opinion is the one that should carry the most weight. And the parent doesn't see that child in the academic sense. They see that child as you know their child. And sometimes they don't know how to make the best decision for that child.

In this statement the administrator clearly suggests that the administrator wants "the best thing for the child" and that perhaps that a parental participant in the grade placement

committee meeting may not have all of the academic information about the child necessary to make an informed decision regarding their promotion or their retention.

Another administrator stated:

You always talk to the teacher first that was thinking of retaining that child. So if a teacher was thinking of retaining a child, we always had a conference with that teacher. We always tried to get all that information from that teacher. And really, we weighed the pros and cons and most of the time, it was not to retain. If I could help it at that level, my level, then we wouldn't retain that child. Unless the parent came back and said no I really want him retained. And then we had to conference with the parent. Give them the pros and cons and the benefits and non benefits of that child going out. But that has been my experience.

If we can come up with some type of system. To where we're not really, especially I think at the elementary level, even at the secondary. Where the students are able to make up those credits. Or at the high school level and make up, the student has time or we provide more opportunities for that child to be able to catch up. In whatever area he's falling behind. We're able to come up with maybe non-grade level things. Or him to be able to, or her to be able to spend extra time being able to catch up instead of having to retain that student.

The administrator relates that retention was discouraged most of the time. Perhaps if retention was discouraged, but never explicitly given as a directive to administrators, then this could be an unwritten assumption surrounding the grade placement committee decisions. Another assumption derived from this statement is that if the parent pushed for retention, then a discussion about retention was had with the parent.

The parents did not seem to feel that they had a significant voice in the decision-making process and therefore were an unwilling participant in an underlying agenda to which they were not privy. One parent commented:

You know when I talked with their teacher and she already knew what she wanted them to do. She didn't want to say, let's try this and, we're going to do it this way. And that isn't right neither. That's why I say yes or no. (Not everybody has the same chance?) No.

The parent perceived the decision-making committee to be something of a façade because they felt the decision had been made before the meeting was actually held. This presents a policy problem with the grade placement committee process because if all the stakeholders do not feel as if they have decision-making authority, then there is not trust in the system. This lack of trust may be contributing to the breakdown in the way that the SSI is implemented and functioning at the local level.

A call for change due to dissatisfaction with the system

Several of the research participants candidly expressed in their thoughts on the current system. Several participants mentioned their dissatisfaction with the current system and a need to change the system for the sake of the students. Several teachers stated:

In all honesty, we are in an era of teaching authentic methods and studies show that you can have a very very intelligent child who just cannot test if their life depended on it and you are punishing a child for not being able to take a test that quote they were trained for and what I've seen happen is that our philosophies in teaching are pretty much being thrown out the window so that we can teach toward being successful toward the test I don't care how you call it, its still teaching toward the test, when you are constantly pushing strategies, I have kids who cannot use someone else's strategy and we're forcing them. You get an advanced child or a gifted child for example an you start forcing them to do strategies, what's going to happen they are going to get bored an they are just Not going to do it for you or they are going to start reading between lines that are not there and reason to the wrong answer, let a child respond, if we're going to teach them authentically, let them be assessed authentically. I would prefer seeing chapter tests or end of semester exams. Um, and let them move forward from that. The constant assessment its hilarious in the classroom when you have so many practice that the kids are coming to you, and asking is this the real thing, is this the real one and if not they're not going to try for you, they are tested so often. (stated by a teacher)

Personally I just feel some strong changes have to be made, things that I haven't heard of and I would like to eventually see is of all those high school seniors that met all the requirements, how many have still not received their diploma because they did not pass one of the four mandatory tests. Because you have high school

seniors having to come up with projects, having to pass all their exams just in school, make sure they have their twenty some odd. Twenty-six hours of credits and they'll pass the math, reading social studies, and boom dread lock on the science and there is no meeting of the minds to say hey this kids taken this test umpteen times, lets go ahead and give them their degree. It's a, that letter keeps on going home, they've got another chance, but no one is preparing them, they are slowly forgetting whatever they knew and so are these kids now going and getting a GED? How will they do it in college, will they be able to, what does it do to their self esteem, have they just completely dropped out and it has nothing to do with their ability as far as what they mastered. They were, denied the opportunity to cross the stage, even though that's not a state thing, that's a district thing, because if they've met the standards a parent can petition to allow their student to cross the stage, they just won't be given that diploma, but crossing the stage is just a ceremony which might help the student but they'll never get that piece of paper, how many of those are out there. I know every year I hear about it on the news, parents are all upset, so I would like to see that. What's going on with that, because if you think about it those kids who are struggling, to pass in elementary and middle school does it eventually happen in high school, are there repeat cases, all because of testing anxiety, so who knows.
(stated by a teacher)

I think that it could be a little bit better. I think that we could, we're lacking. Of course we're always going to be lacking resources. But, I mean that if maybe we did things a little bit differently. If we took the time to really look at what was needed. Instead of looking, instead of saying, "This kid needs to pass this test". That's not necessarily, you know, the most important thing. To me it's not. I'm going to say look reading, reading, reading, that's all we're going to do.
(stated by a teacher)

With regard to a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the current accountability system and when asked about whether or not the Student Success Initiative achieves what it was intended to achieve, essentially reduced numbers of students who are socially promoted, the research participants stated,:

No, I don't think that it helps. It, I think that we're saying initially is the right thing. But what we're doing doesn't match up with what we're saying. You know what I mean.
(stated by a teacher)

This teacher seems to be expressing the mismatch between the educational policy and the ways in which it is implemented at the local level. This comment infers that the

intentions of the policy are “the right thing” but the ways in which it is implemented are not. Several other teachers stated:

I don't agree with the test, I don't think all kids are test-takers and I don't think it should be based on a test. No. No, I think if we're basing if the child passes or not on a test, then they're having to promote a lot more kids, socially, because a lot, well here, a lot of kids do not pass. And if we did not have the test I think they would, well depending on their scores, I don't think a lot of kids can take the TAKS test and be successful at this. (stated by a teacher)

No, I think if we're basing if the child passes or not on a test, then they're having to promote a lot more kids, socially, because a lot, well here, a lot of kids do not pass. And if we did not have the test I think they would, well depending on their scores, I don't think a lot of kids can take the TAKS test and be successful at this. (stated by a teacher)

No, I think these kids need to be kept at younger, I mean I think, in the lower grade levels, I really think that our kinder, 1st and 2nd grade teachers already know the students that are going to have problems in the higher grades and I feel that that's where they need to be kept behind. That would give them the opportunity and the children wouldn't feel it as much, they'd forget about it. By the time they are in fourth, fifth and they catch up. I'm a strong believer in that. (stated by a teacher)

These teachers are expressing dissatisfaction with the emphasis that is placed on the TAKS test for students as well as with the system as a whole. There is a sentiment that the teachers do not perceive the TAKS test as being a successful measure for all students. Also, the teachers voiced the opinion that students need to be retained more often in the lower grade levels than in the higher grade levels. The research participants seemed to place a great amount of importance of the TAKS test and expressed dissatisfaction with the high-stakes connection to the test. Several participants stated:

I don't like the idea of one test determines whether that child's going to pass or not. There is a lot of other criteria that can be used. The test is really just one thing they should use. Not the whole thing. (stated by an administrator)

I think it kind of sucks in a way. You know, truthfully. Because I mean, this is kind of like SAT's for high school students. You don't pass that, you don't

graduate. So they're sitting here telling you one little test. I mean, you could sit there and make hundreds all year long. My daughter could have sat there and made hundreds all year long and one little test is going to tell her she can't pass. So think it's kind of bogus. (stated by a parent)

My opinion of this initiative is, I guess, mixed, because I feel at one point, I feel that students feel a lot of stress with the TAKS test to being with, so we have students who are anxious nervous about performing and if a student is a good reader, can read on level, they may have, they may be nervous that day and so there's so many factors involved in taking the test and I'm thinking about my population and my students, but my opinion of this whole initiative is that its good that we want to monitor the students because we want to make sure that we're doing best practices and the students are getting what's required of them is what's taught what they need to learn at the same time we have students that are getting anxious about passing these tests and so just the thought of being retained or it does worry parents, it does worry the students because you can be a good reader but not do well on a release TAKS or on the day of the test, you just, got so nervous and sometimes I feel like its not, it shouldn't be the only element, or the only thing to look at when looking at students achievement. (stated by a teacher)

The participants state a need for decision-makers to take more than just the TAKS test into consideration when making promotion and retention decisions for students. The participants' views of the SSI call for a more holistic view of the child rather than solely the scores on the TAKS tests.

Summary

Teacher Perceptions

Throughout the interview process it became evident that the teachers expressed similar themes in their perceptions of social promotion, retention and their roles in the grade placement committee. The themes were consistent when compared and coded. Various unexpected themes and similar viewpoints emerged through the interviews. Among these unexpected themes were teacher commentaries regarding the physical size of students who were being considered for retention. The teachers often commented about a students' physical size and maturity or their development level in their perception

when discussing the possibility of retention. This was often a topic of concern during a grade placement committee meeting. Other themes expressed by teachers included the lack of power or lack of “voice” during a grade placement committee meeting. The teachers reached a consensus separately on one of two possible power differentials. Other themes that were not as widely represented by the teachers were commentary and concerns about the tension and anxiety that they observe in students because of the TAKS test and the high-stakes that are connected to it. They collectively viewed either the parents of students or administrators to be the dominant voice in the grade placement committee meetings. The teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the current accountability system and many expressed a need for an overhaul of the system.

Parental Perceptions

Though the teacher and the administrator perceptions contrasted vastly during the interview process, the parental perceptions were even more different. It is important to note that the parents were the most difficult group with whom to obtain interviews. The teachers on their respective campuses queried the parents about their interest in participating in the study but many parents were approached in order to find the few willing to volunteer. It should also be disclosed that there was a distinct sense that the parents interviewed from the campus who were not familiar with the principal investigator could be best described as timid, perhaps even intimidated, or skeptical to assurances that their anonymity would be kept. It made the interview process somewhat difficult when these particular parents transcripts were coded they often answered in one-word phrases and responded to almost every question in an agreeable and a positive

manner. Other parents had poignant personal accounts of their children's experiences with retention and these accounts added a rich layer to the research.

Administrator Perceptions

The perspective of the administrator differed slightly from that of the teacher. The administrators often made comments regarding the power or positionality of the parents in the grade placement committee meetings. The administrators who were interviewed were decidedly candid in their responses, often echoing the teachers' dissatisfaction with the current accountability system and expressing a need for the current system to be changed. From the administrators' vantage point, the deciding factor in decisions made at the local level regarding students' impending retention or promotion established the parent as the most integral voice in the committee.

Unanticipated Themes

In the process of the research, several unexpected themes emerged that are of notable significance. One such unanticipated theme was the frequent comment from teachers regarding the physical size of students or the mention in the meeting of their perceived maturity or development level as a seemingly important factor in determining their retention or promotion. The research participants regarded those whom they perceived to have the power in the decision-making process through the grade placement committee. The various stakeholders also spoke about whether or not they thought that the other committee members had an equal opportunity to give input as well as whether or not they felt their own voice was heard in those decision-making sessions. Another frequently voiced concern referenced a need for students to be retained in the lower grade levels as a more effective alternative to students being retained in third and fifth grades.

Teachers, parents and administrators alike made comments about the tensions, the nerves, and the anxiety observed from students about taking the TAKS test. Overall, the teachers as a group were mixed in their opinions on the effectiveness of the SSI.

In summary, the research participants had many concerns regarding the SSI and their perceptions about the ways in which the state level policy is implemented at the local level. The emergent themes that were drawn from the coding of the data were themes of perceived power, underlying and unwritten agendas, and dissatisfaction with the system already in place. In general there was an overall feeling of stakeholder dissatisfaction with the current system and a call for changing the system in order to improve it for all parties involved. The parents were concerned about their retained students and about placing too much importance on the TAKS test itself. The teachers' uneasiness revolved around the effects on the psychological well being of their retained students. The administrators were concerned about the students being retained and were seemingly following an unwritten agenda to avoid retention whenever possible. The only positive aspects of the SSI expressed by stakeholders were in the vein of keeping teachers and school personnel accountable at a high level of expectation for educating students. Rarely did stakeholders express their experiences with retention as positive. The research participants often expressed that they perceived students to be more likely to be promoted after the grade placement committee meetings and that in their experiences, students were promoted most often.

Conclusion

The predominant themes that emerged from the data were explored and expanded upon in explanation and interpretation of the results in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6

recommendations, conclusions and implications for future research and policy are discussed.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the major themes that emerged from the data, provides recommendations for alternative solutions to this educational policy problem, and expounds upon implications for policy, for institutional theory, and for educational practice. There will also be a discussion about the implications for future research in this area.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research lies in the examination of perceptions regarding social promotion and retention policies and the ways that those policies are implemented at the local level. The stakeholder views of these policies are what ultimately guide the intended and the unintended effects of this legislation at the local level. In order to address the issues of public opinion and of implementation or interpretation of the Student Success Initiative an examination of stakeholder perceptions was executed and analyzed. The research in the area of social promotion and retention often outlines the negative consequences that these academic interventions have for students. The research in this study is significant in that the Student Success Initiative is so recent that there is hardly any previous research in this area. This research is important in capturing the perceptions of the major stakeholders who are involved in social promotion and retention decisions at the local level. The experiences of the stakeholders are important because these key people are the decision-makers in the grade placement committee meetings where promotion and retention decisions are made and the SSI final process is completed.

The educational policy problem lies in the methods of SSI implementation and interpretation at the local level.

Research Questions

In this study of stakeholder perceptions regarding social promotion and retention policies the findings were based upon the following research questions:

1. What are teachers, parents, and staff understanding of the social promotion law when it comes to its application at the local level?
2. What decision-making mechanisms exist to implement social promotion policies
3. What are teachers' significant concerns when applying the law?
4. What are the outcomes of the implementation of social promotion policy at the local level?

The examination of stakeholder perceptions provided the data for this research in fourteen semi-structured interviews. The interviewed stakeholders included parents, teachers, and both campus and district administrators. The participants' responses to the research questions provided an in-depth understanding of the considerations taken in the context of the grade placement committee meetings regarding student promotion and retention. The stakeholder perceptions assisted in shedding light into how the SSI is implemented and used at the local level.

Research Participants

The research participants included in this research were stakeholders who had experience or accrued knowledge of the grade placement committee procedures and

intricacies. The research participants included teachers, parents and both campus and district level administrators on two campuses in the same school district. In all, fourteen interviews were conducted with the various stakeholders.

The research participants participated in short semi-structured interviews regarding their perceptions of social promotion and retention issues. Often the research participants used their personal or professional experiences in order to draw conclusions about the Student Success Initiative. On occasion, leading or probing questions were asked of interview participants if the interview was deemed to require it from the participant. The participants were chosen for this research through a combination of convenience, purposive, critical case sampling and key informant sampling.

Research Methods

For this research, case study methods were employed to examine the two campuses selected for the study. An interview protocol correlating to the research questions was developed and was used as a guide for the interviews with the stakeholder participants. The data was collected, transcribed and coded utilizing the tenets of grounded theory in order to draw conclusions from the data. In this vein, a constant comparative method was used to identify emergent themes.

Document Artifact Collection

Throughout the data collection process various documents related to the SSI were examined. According to several of these documents, there is information regarding the possibility of student promotion even after failing all three administrations of the TAKS test. One such statement is located on the state template for grade placement committee minutes and states: "If all members agree that the student is likely to perform on grade

level if given accelerated instruction during the following year, the student shall be promoted.” The accelerated instruction plan includes a checklist of when and how the accelerated instruction will be implemented and includes suggestions as to when it could be done such as, “during reading class, before school, during school, after school, other...” The suggestions included on this document for how the accelerated instruction plan could be implemented include: “individual reading instruction, small reading groups, extended-day reading instruction, additional time in class, additional reading time with another teacher, other...” Other provisions of the grade placement committee template include standards for promotion upon appeal. If the parent, as a member of the grade placement committee, submits a letter of appeal refusing for their child to be retained then additional documentation must also be included. The document states:

The Grade Placement Committee shall review all facts and circumstances and apply the following standards in deciding to promote or retain the student: I. Evidence of satisfactory student performance (check instruments used and performance): Reading Grade, Portfolio, Work Samples, Local assessments (attach a copy of results that identifies the instrument), Diagnostic test or inventory (attach a copy of results that identifies the instrument).

Clearly even in the decisions to promote a student there is significant documentation that should be included with the grade placement committee paperwork. The required signatures on the grade placement committee documentation include: Principal (or designee), Reading Teacher or Math Teacher, Parent/Guardian, LPAC Representative (if applicable), Other. The grade placement committee documentation ideally follows the student to the next grade level. Several research participants gave permission for their student’s grade placement documentation to be examined, specifically the deliberations or notes section of the documents. On the occasion that a student was retained after the

grade placement committee meeting, there were often comments written about the student, especially in fifth grade, which read, “The student did not pass any of the three administrations of the TAKS test in reading or in math and will be retained.” Some comments that were frequently written included, “The student will be promoted with an accelerated instruction plan.” If the grade placement committee convened before summer school then the documentation frequently read, “The student will attend summer school and take the third administration of the TAKS Reading or TAKS Mathematics test.”

Other documents examined include the “Parent Notification of Student Performance on the Grade 3 or Grade 5 Texas Assessment of Knowledge & Skills Reading or Math Test.” This document simply states: “Your child (has/has not) met the passing standard for the reading test. Your child has/has not met the state requirement in reading for grade advancement under the Student Success Initiative.” Once parents receive this letter along with their students’ Confidential Student Report, then the accelerated instruction for the student begins before the next administration of the TAKS test.

The other utilized documents included the letters sent to parents called the “Confirmation of Participation in the Grade Placement Committee Meeting after the Third Test Administration” in order to obtain their confirmation to attend the grade placement committee meeting and, if they cannot attend, the waiver of parent participation in the Grade Placement Committee meeting. On the same confirmation of participation document there is an area where parents can appeal grade retention, sign, and date the document. The examination of the documents required by the SSI offered further insight into the inner-workings of the grade placement committee meetings. The

most revealing portions were the completed deliberations or notes sections of the grade placement committee meeting minutes.

Summary of Themes

The analysis of the research yielded several emergent themes regarding stakeholder perceptions surrounding social promotion and retention issues. The emergent themes included perceived power, underlying or unwritten agendas, and a sense of stakeholder dissatisfaction with the current system and a subsequent call for change. The research participants generally provided candid responses. Often the stakeholders offered additional opinions and views related to questions asked from the interview protocol. After the interviews were completed, many participants expressed a hope that this research would contribute to a positive change in the implementation of social promotion and retention policies and also voiced a hope for a positive change in the accountability system as a whole.

Implications for Theory

As previously discussed, the notion of distrust explained in Clune's institutional choice theory is exemplified in the emergent themes that developed from the data analysis. The emergent themes of perceived power, of underlying or unwritten agendas, and of dissatisfaction with the system or call for change are all themes of distrust within the SSI system. The three emergent themes all lent themselves to a distrust of the system as a whole, as Clune posits with institutional choice theory.

The Student Success Initiative is a recent state reform. "Institutional choice predicts significant aspects of recent state reforms of education" (Clune, 1987, p. 119). Specifically, Clune refers to "a prediction of how the issues were perceived and framed,

the aspects of the issues that became significant, the decision-making logic, and certain structural features, such as the contingency, indeterminacy, and inherent instability of the decisions” (Clune, 1987, p. 120). Perceived and framed in various ways by the grade placement committee stakeholders, the issues of student retention and of promotion allowed for variation in the methods of policy implementation at the local level. The decision-making logic of which Clune speaks varies with the stakeholder and their individual perception, and is therefore subject to the instability of the formed decisions.

Provided the three tenets of institutional choice, the SSI and the decision-making processes at the local level can be applied. Clune lists “the following three clusters of facts predicted, or highlighted, by the theory of institutional choice as the basic institutional choice, rationale and comparative institutional analysis, and instability of the choice” (1987, p. 120). Clune contends that, “Choice of decision-making institution frequently is an extremely important element of a policy decision because the capacity to achieve substantive goals is sharply constrained by characteristics of the available decision-making institutions” (1987, p. 118). The basic institutional choice is the Student Success Initiative as enacted by the seventy-sixth legislature and then- Governor Bush. “Policy instruments are institutional choices by policymakers, and, conversely, institutional choices are policy instruments” (Clune, 1987, p. 125). The SSI is then a policy instrument and an institutional choice by policymakers. The rationale for the promotional gates set by the SSI lie in the explanation that Governor Bush gave where he contended that too many students were being socially promoted and that too many students were not receiving adequate academic interventions, especially in the areas of reading and mathematics and were therefore unprepared for the real world (Valenzuela,

2005, p.126 and 127). In this sense the state is acting in an attempt to “impose higher standards on what is perceived” to be a district or local level mentality of lower standards for student achievement (1987, p. 21). In the institutional analysis, the SSI exhibits distrust of the state as a final decision-maker in the retention and the promotion decisions that are left to the local level stakeholders. The feeling of dissatisfaction and the expression of a need for systematic change can be attributed to the stakeholder distrust of the state as the decision-maker. The varying stakeholder understandings and perceptions regarding the SSI contribute to their lack of trust amongst each other and within the system as a whole. Clune posits, “a simmering debate exists over the most appropriate level for educational monitoring: state or local government (David, 1987)” (1987, p. 124). Perhaps the local level stakeholders express a need for systematic change and express dissatisfaction with the current SSI policy because they perceive to have a more appropriate level for educational monitoring that the state that is imposing this policy on them. As Clune posits, in the framework of institutional choice the policymaker has comparative advantage using a variety of interventions. (1987, p. 126). The Student Success Initiative passes on a mandate of promotional gates to the local school districts. According to Clune, “mandates provide a comparative advantage only under certain circumstances, for example, when there is a clear standard and capacity to comply” (1987, p. 126). The clear standard by which the mandate has a comparative advantage from the perspective of the state is the required passing standards on the TAKS tests. A policy instrument such as the SSI “has comparative advantage because it is hotly contested” (Clune, 1987, p. 126). Social promotion and retention policies, especially

when mandated through a high-stakes testing context, are often “hotly contested” issues for a variety of stakeholders.

In this context, the state is an actor in the educational policy and passes a mandate through the promotional gates established by the SSI that ultimately is left to compliance at the local level. This leads to instability of the choice. There is instability of the SSI as an institutional choice due to the level of distrust that the stakeholders have of the state, of the system, i.e., of the educational establishment as a whole, and of each other in the grade placement committee decision-making mechanism.

Limitations of Institutional Choice Theory

There are several limitations of institutional choice as a model. “The framework captures a sense of relatively low expectations for policy (a policy is worthwhile if it is a little better than the next worst institution) but also a keen sense of the limits of policy (e.g., in spite of the many imperfections of local decision-making, the difficulty of improving on them by state policies)” (Clune, 1987, p. 128). The aspect of local decision-making is central to the SSI and therefore inherently problematic for the policy implications. Another limitation of institutional choice is that “the logic of comparative institutional advantage also implies the futility of seeking perfect, or ideal, implementation of a policy (and, thus, the fallacy of criticizing policies from the idealistic point of view)” (Clune, 1987, p. 118). This is a limitation, of course, because the tendency of an educational policy researcher is to seek an ideal implementation of a policy. The institutional choice theory as a framework for an examination of educational policy is useful to ask policy questions to determine the effectiveness of a policy;

however, it does not offer suggestions as to how best to maneuver the state and the local control debate that will always be a problematic aspect of educational policy.

Implications for Practice

There are several implications for practice surrounding social promotion and retention policies and the policy actors in the grade placement committee structure. Now that the perceptions of various stakeholders are identified, the hope is that this research can contribute to future grade placement committee decision-makers in order to aid them in the arduous process. As suggested by some of the administrators and teachers in the interviews, if some parents are perhaps better informed regarding their role in the decision-making process, then they can more effectively participate actively in the grade placement committee meetings. Parental empowerment is a significant implication for practice. Ideally social workers and other campus personnel would work directly with parents to ensure that they were well informed and versed in how to advocate for their children especially with regard to participation in the grade placement committee meeting structure. If campus personnel are aware of how often students are promoted, even after not meeting the passing standards on the TAKS tests, then a detailed and a precise accelerated instruction plan that will follow the students to the next grade level can be developed. Another implication for practice would be targeting students who are at-risk of failure early in their school careers through a Response to Intervention approach, which has more recently been pushed as a movement in public education. If future stakeholders are aware of the dynamics of the decision-making processes, then they can render better-informed decisions regarding such critical educational issues as student promotion and as retention in a high-stakes testing context.

Implications for Policy

Perhaps the most significant implication for this research is the educational policy aspect. It is the hope of the researcher that other stakeholder groups such as legislators, school district personnel, state agency employees, future teachers, parents and school administrators utilize the perceptions of the stakeholders included in this study in order to guide their own decisions. The educational policy aspect would require an examination of the policy effectiveness. Given the stakeholder perceptions regarding the ineffectiveness of the SSI combined with the state, district, and campus level data indicating the large percentages of students who are socially promoted after not meeting passing standards on the TAKS test, perhaps a call for change in the policy can be made. It would seem that the social promotion legislation effect has the opposite of its intended function when considering the stakeholder perceptions and experiences with the policy and factoring in the examination of the data. Since the outcomes of the policy are contradictory to their purpose, changes must be made in order to more effectively serve students.

According to Thompson, “Policymakers considering no social promotion policies should know that while such policies can pay off for the majority of students, several cautions are in order” (Thompson, 2001). Thompson warns policymakers that, “Sound decisions require multiple assessments. The decision to promote a student should not be made on the basis of a single test, and especially not a single administration of a single test” (2001). This advice by Thompson coincides with the research published by the American Psychological Association regarding the appropriate use of high-stakes assessments. “Standards developed by several professional societies condemn use of a

single administration of a single assessment to make any high stakes decision, instead encouraging the use of several sources of evidence in making such decisions” (Thompson, 2001). In Texas the students are given three opportunities to take the high-stakes assessment. Thompson further warns that “provisions should be made for students to take accountability tests more than once if necessary and for local educators to use additional evidence in making promotion decisions” (2001). This advice by Thompson is reflected in the structure of the grade placement committee, as the local educators do consider additional evidence with making promotion decisions. Finally Thompson suggests, “If policymakers wish to minimize the chance that retained students will be harmed, and maximize the chances that they will be helped, then policy should call for special assistance to continue during and beyond the year in which the student is retained” (2001). The hope of this research is that policymakers utilize the findings as a guide for making social promotion and retention policy decisions that are implemented and that function in the manner in which they were intended.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study is that the promotional gates put into place by the Student Success Initiative are so recent that there is not a large body of data to examine longitudinally. The SSI was passed in 1999 and the first cohort of students expected to meet the expectations for passing were in third grade in the 2002-2003 school year. At the end of the 2005-2006 school year, there will be a second group of students who have experienced the promotional gates; at that time there will be more data to contribute to the examination of the policy interpretation and implementation. Beginning in the academic year 2007-2008, eighth grade students will also be subject to the SSI in

reading and mathematics; coincidentally, this is the first cohort of students who experienced the promotional gates of the SSI both in third grade in 2003 and in fifth grade in 2005. This particular group will be necessary for future evaluation to further determine the effectiveness of the SSI.

A significant limitation of this research lies in the fact that I was an active participant in the very cases that I examined. As an employee of the school district that I am examining, it is difficult to ascertain how much of an impact I, as the researcher, had on the perceptions of the participants. It is unknown whether or not the participants who were familiar with me in the school setting felt that they could be completely candid with their responses. It is also unknown whether or not the administrators who were interviewed felt some sense of loyalty to support the system or tout its virtues while still expressing their concerns with the elements of the system that they perceived to be problematic. An additional limitation of this research lies in the number of research participants who were interviewed. Because only fourteen research participants underwent interviews, there is a distinct possibility that a larger volume of interviewees would wield different conclusions or themes. It is difficult to draw broad themes applicable to larger, whole populations from this research from the smaller population that participated in this research. Another limitation of this research was in the lack of comparison amongst different populations of students since the campuses chosen for the case study were campuses with high numbers of students of color and of lower socioeconomic status. Another limitation of this research was the difficulty obtaining a higher volume of grade placement committee documentation from the parents of students who were socially promoted or retained; often this was impossible either because the

parents did not have additional copies of the documents or because for unknown reasons their children's student folders were not followed to the next grade level. This could be attributed to the inconsistencies that exist amongst school districts and campuses as to how the grade placement committee documentation will be kept and how it will follow the student to their next grade level. However, enough documents were examined that sufficient conclusions and themes could be drawn. A final limitation is the guaranteed confidentiality of the research participants themselves; they did not go on formal record with their responses and views, and so their identities cannot be revealed.

Future Research

The research in the examination of stakeholder perceptions regarding social promotion and retention policies included in this study is just the beginning of the assessment of the Student Success Initiative. Next year, the 2007-2008 cohort of eighth grade students will also be subject to SSI and will be required to pass the TAKS reading and mathematics test in order to be promoted to the next grade level. This cohort of students will be the first group of students to have been subjected to the promotional gates provided by the SSI in third, fifth and eighth grade. Further research will need to be done in order to examine the students who will be subject to SSI in eighth grade. This year will provide the third data point for the third grade cohort and the second data point for the fifth grade cohort. It will be critical to examine whether or not the students in these cohorts are being socially promoted at high levels as they were in the past. Interviews with new stakeholders will assist in gauging their perceptions of the SSI and perhaps learning of their new understandings of the law when that it will have been active for a longer period of time.

In the new examination of student cohorts who have been impacted by the Student Success Initiative it will also be beneficial for the state to find a means of recording distinctions for students as falsely promotion if they have not met the passing standards for the TAKS tests and truly promoted if they have met the passing standards for the TAKS tests.

Currently there is a House Bill out of the Public Education committee, House Bill (HB) 136, primarily authored by Representative Dora Olivo, which is attempting to require the grade placement committee to meet after the second failure on the TAKS test rather than on the third failure. HB 136 is also attempting to put several requirements in place for accelerated instructional plans to be kept on a more consistent basis and for students who have previously been subject to the SSI to be closely monitored in their next school year. HB 136 would authorize the grade placement committee to require summer remediation for students who did not meet the passing requirements for TAKS and this would require hiring additional teachers for this summer school remediation.

Conclusions

This chapter revisited the research purpose, the research questions, the research participants and the research methods. The emergent themes were also summarized. The emergent themes drawn from the data include tones of perceived power, of underlying or unwritten agendas, and a call for change or sense of dissatisfaction with the current system. These themes emerged from the interviews with the research participants including parents of students who had experience with the SSI or retention and social promotion, with teachers, and with district or campus level administrators. The chapter examined the implications for theory, for educational policy and for practical application.

The convergence of state, of district and of local policy was an integral portion of the examination of the Student Success Initiative. Moreover, the stakeholder perceptions of social promotion and retention issues contributed largely to a deeper understanding of the dynamics that went into the decisions made in the grade placement committee meetings. This examination of perceptions provided a better understanding of how the local level personnel as actors in the decision-making committee interpret and implement the SSI.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What have been your experiences with social promotion or retention policies?
2. What are the advantages or disadvantages of retention or social promotion in your perception?
3. What is the nature of your involvement with the grade placement committee meetings?
4. What if, any, are the alternatives to retention?
5. What is your understanding of the Student Success Initiative, Senate Bill 4?
6. Do you feel as if all the participants of the grade placement committee have equal opportunity to voice their recommendations and concerns?
7. What are your observations about the parents' role in the decisions that are made in the grade placement committee?
8. What are your observations about the administrators' and teacher's role in the grade placement committee?
9. In your perception what are the effects of the Student Success Initiative?
10. In your experience or perception do you believe that the Student Success Initiative achieves what it was intended to, i.e., reduced numbers of students who are socially promoted?
11. In your perception is retention an effective tool for student achievement when they have not met passing standards on the TAKS test?
12. In your perception what are the effects of the Student Success Initiative?
13. In your experience or perception do you believe that the Student Success Initiative achieves what it was intended to, i.e., reduced numbers of students who are socially promoted?

REFERENCES

- August, D., & Hakuta, K. (1997). Improving schooling for language-minority children: A research agenda. Washington, DC: National Research Council.
- Akmal, T. & Larsen, D. (2004). *Keeping History From Repeating Itself: Involving Parents About Retention Decisions to Support Student Achievement*. Retrieved on April 20, 2006 from http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/publications/RMLE/rmle_vol27_no2_article6.pdf.
- American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (1999). *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association. Retrieved on March 1, 2007 from <http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/testing.html>.
- American Federation of Teachers. (1997). *Passing on Failure: District Promotion Policies and Practices*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Barksdale-Ladd, M. A., & Thomas, K. F. (2000). What's at stake in high-stakes testing: Teachers and parents speak out. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51, 384-397.
- Bogden, J. & Purnell, S. (2000). Failure is not an option. *The State Education Standard*, Autumn 2000: 5-10.
- Byrnes, D. A., & Yamamoto, K. (1985). Academic retention of elementary pupils: An inside look. *Education*, 106, 209-214
- Cárdenas, J.A. *Multicultural Education: A Generation of Advocacy*. Needham Heights, Mass.: Simon and Schuster Custom Publishing, 1995.
- Clune, W. H. (1987). Institutional choice as a theoretical framework for research on educational policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 117-132.
- Cortez, A., McCollum, P., Maroney, O., Montes, F. (1999). *Failing Our Children: Finding Alternatives to In-Grade Retention*. Intercultural Development Research Association. Retrieved on May 1, 2006 from <http://www.idra.org/images/stories/ingrade.pdf>.

- Darling-Hammond, Linda. (2005). *No Child Left Behind and High School Reform*. Retrieved May 2, 2006 from <http://www.qualityednow.org/statelegresource/conference2005/session6-HSReform.pdf>.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). Avoiding both grade retention and social promotion. *Education Digest*, 64, 48-54.
- Darling-Hammond, L. "Alternatives to Grade Retention," Internet posting, *The School Administrator* (August 1998).
- Denton, David. (2001). *Finding Alternatives to Failure: Can States End Social Promotion and Reduce Retention Rates*. Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved on May 1, 2006 from <http://www.sreb.org/programs/srr/pubs/alternatives/AlternativesToFailure.pdf>.
- Dutro, E., Collins, K. M., & Collins, J. (2002). *Teachers' responses to the standards movement: Perspectives from literacy practitioners in three states*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Eisner, E., & Peshkin, A. (Eds.). (1990). *Qualitative inquiry in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Elliott, S. J., & Gillie, J. (1998). Moving experiences: a qualitative analysis of health and migration. *Health & Place*, 4(4), 327-339.
- Feagin, J., Orum, A., & Sjoberg, G. (Eds.). (1991). *A case for case study*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers*. New York: Longman.
- Grissom, J.B. and Shepard, L.A. (1989). Repeating and dropping out of school. In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds). *Flunking Grades: Research and Policies on Retention*, 34-63. London: Falmer.
- Guion, L. (2002). *Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies*. University of Florida Extension. Available: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FY/FY39400.pdf>.
- Hamel, J., Dufour, S., & Fortin, D. (1993). *Case study methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Heck, Ronald. (2004). *Studying Educational and Social Policy*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: Mahwah, NJ.
- Hauser, R. (1999). *Should we end social promotion? Truth and consequences* (CDE Working Paper No. 99-06). Madison, WI: Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Hauser, R., Pager, D., & Simmons, S. (2000). *Race-ethnicity, social background, and grade retention*. Paper presented at the National Invitational Conference hosted by the Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University for Research in Human Development and Education, Alexandria, VA.
- Holmes, C. T. (1989). "Grade-level retention effects: A meta-analysis of research studies." In L.A. Shepard & M.L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention*. (pp. 16-33). Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- House, E. (1989). "Policy Implications of Retention Research." In L.A. Shepard and M. L. Smith (Eds.), *Flunking Grades: Research and Policies on Retention*. (pp. 202-213). Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- Jimerson, S.R. (2001). Meta-analysis of grade retention research: Implications for practice in the 21st century. *School Psychology Review*, 30, 420-438.
- Jimerson, S.R. et al. (2002). *Beyond Grade Retention and Social Promotion: Interventions to Promote Social Cognitive Competence*. Santa Barbara, CA: Gervitz Graduate School of Education, University of California. Available at <http://www.education.ucsb.edu/jimerson/retention/BeyondRetention.pdf>.
- Light, Paul. 1984. "The Presidential Policy Stream." Pp. 423-48 in M. Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System* (Washington, DC: CQ Press); reprinted in Stella Z. Theodoulou and Matthew A. Cahn. 1995. *Public Policy: The Essential Readings* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall), pp. 224-37.
- Marshall, MN. Sampling for qualitative research. *Family Practice* 1996; 13: 522-525.
- McCoy, A. R., & Reynolds, A. J. (1998, August). *Grade retentions and school performance: An extended investigation* (Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Paper No. 1167-98). Retrieved January 1, 2002, from <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/pubs/dp116798.pdf>.
- McLemore, Larry. *Notes on John Kingdon, Agendas and Public Policies, 2e*, 1995. Retrieved April 1, 2006 from <http://fs.huntingdon.edu/jlewis/Syl/PA/307KingdonOuts.htm#Stream>.

- Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis: A source book for new methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ogbu, J. (1994). Racial stratification and education in the United States: Why inequality persists. *Teachers College Record*, 2 (96).
- Punch, K. F. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London: Sage Ltd.
- Pyecha, J. (1988). *A case study of the application of noncategorical special education in two states*. Chapel Hill, NC: Research Triangle Institute.
- Roderick, M., Bryk, A. S., Jacob, B. A., Easton, J. Q., & Allensworth, E. (1999). *Ending social promotion: Results from the first two years*. Retrieved January 1, 2002, from http://www.consortium-Chicago.org/Html_web_store_3.0/Html/endsocialpromo.html.
- Rudolph, A. (1999). Education and Social Promotion: What is the Debate? North Central Regional Educational Laboratory Draft No. 04-8-99. Available: <http://www.cep-dc.org/socialpromotion/educationsocialpromotionwhatdebate.pdf>.
- Schwager, M. T., Mitchell, D. E., Mitchell, T. K. & Hecht, J. B. (1992). How school district policy influences grade level retention in elementary schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 14 (4), 421-438.
- Shepard, L. A. & Smith, M. L. (1987, October). *Effects of kindergarten retention at the end of first grade*. *Psychology in the Schools*, 24(4), 346-357.
- Shepard, L.A., & Smith, M.L. (Eds.). (1989). *Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention*. London: Falmer Press.
- Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. "Synthesis of Research on Grade Retention." *Educational Leadership* 47/8 (1990): 84-88.
- Slavin, R. E., & Madden, N. A. (1999). Effects of bilingual and English as a second language adaptations of Success for all on the reading achievement of students acquiring English. *Journal of Education For Students Placed At-risk*, 4 (4), 393-416.
- Smith, M. and L. Shepard. (1985). *Illinois Fair Schools Coalition Report*: Chicago, IL.
- Smith, M. L., Heinecke, W., & Noble, A. J. (1999). Assessment policy and political spectacle. *Teachers College Record*, 101, 151-191.

- Solis, A. and Romero, A. (2005). *The Promise and Perils of the Texas School Success Initiative*. Intercultural Development Research Association. Available: http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletters/October_2005/The_Promise_and_Perils_of_the_Texas_School_Success_Initiative/.
- Spurlock, H.L., Munford, R.L., and Madhere, S. (1995). "Effects of Gender, Race, and Grade Retention on the Developmental Progression of Self-Efficacy Perceptions." Paper presented at the American Psychological Society Conference, New York, July.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stevens, J., Tuck, L., & Zimmerman, F. (1999). One More Time: The Social Promotion Debate. Horizon Site: Issues Challenging Education. Available: http://horizon.unc.edu/projects/issues/papers/one_more_time.html.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Glaser, B. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Taylor, S. (2004). Researching educational policy and change in "new times": Using critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4), 433-452.
- Taylor, S., Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., & Henry, M. (1997). *Educational policy and the politics of change*. London: Routledge.
- Tellis, W. (1997, July). Introduction to case study [68 paragraphs]. *The Qualitative Report* [On-line serial], 3(2). Available: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-2/tellis1.html>.
- Texas Education Agency (2007). Glossary for the Academic Excellence Indicator System 2005-2006. Retrieved on April 1, 2007, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2006/glossary.html>.
- Texas Education Agency (2007). Grade Placement Committee Manual: For Grade Advancement Requirements of the Student Success Initiative. Phase Two Update for the 2006-2007 School Year. Retrieved on April 20, 2006 from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/ssi/gpcmanual07.pdf>.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation* 27: 237-246.

- Thomas, J., & Stockton, C. (2003). Socioeconomic Status, Race, Gender, & Retention: Impact on Student Achievement. Available: <http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol72003/stockton.pdf>.
- Thomas, V. G. (2000). Learner-centered alternatives to social promotion and retention: A talent development approach. *Journal of Negro Education*, 2000, pp. 323-337.
- Thompson, C. L. (1999). Research on retention and social promotion: Synthesis and implications for policy. Chapel Hill, N.C.: North Carolina Education Research Council.
- Thompson, C., & Cunningham, E. (2000). Retention and social promotion: Research and implications for policy. *ERIC Digest*. New York: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 449 241).
- Toles, T., Schulz, E. and Rice, W.K. (1986). "A Study of variation in Dropout Rates Attributable to Effects of High Schools." *Metropolitan Education* 2:30-38.
- U.S. Department of Education. (1999). *Taking responsibility for ending social promotion: A guide for educators and state and local leaders*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Valenzuela, A. (Ed.) (2005). *Leaving Children Behind: How "Texas-style" Accountability Fails Latino Youth*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Walberg, H., Reynolds, A., Wang, M. (2004). *Can Unlike Students Learn Together?: Grade Retention, Tracking, and Grouping*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Yin, R. (1993). *Applications of case study research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

Vita

Anissa Jean Rodriguez was born in McAllen, Texas on May 24, 1978. She is the daughter of Belinda and Jesse Rodriguez and the sister of Jesse Rodriguez Jr. Anissa graduated from Palacios High School in 1996. Upon graduation Anissa attended Blinn College for two years and received an Associate of Arts degree in 1998. Immediately after graduation Anissa transferred to Texas A&M University and received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in 2000. While teaching first grade at Southwood Valley Elementary Anissa received her Masters Degree in Educational Administration in 2003. In 2003 Anissa moved to Austin to begin working for the Texas A&M University System Partnership for Texas Public Schools first as a graduate intern and then as Coordinator of English Language Learner programs. In 2003 Anissa entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin to begin coursework toward her doctorate. Anissa currently works as an Assistant Principal at a bilingual elementary school. Anissa currently lives in Austin, Texas.

Permanent address: 214 Duson Avenue, Palacios, Texas, 77465

This dissertation was typed by the author.